

Valences of Vengeance:  
The Moral Imagination of Early Modern Japanese Vendetta Fiction

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2013



## ABSTRACT

### Valences of Vengeance: The Moral Imagination of Early Modern Japanese Vendetta Fiction

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The Edo period (1600-1867) was an era of revenge, both in lived reality and on the printed page. During the Edo period, revenge for the murder of a senior family member was considered a virtuous act of filial piety, and, following certain bureaucratic protocols, it was legal for junior family members to pursue a lethal vendetta (*katakiuchi*) against the murderer. Over one hundred successful vendettas were carried out over the nearly 270 years of Tokugawa rule, events which formed the ground for a vast number of semi-fictional retellings and purely fictional works, many of them penned by some of the period's most famous authors. As an act of virtuous violence, charged with meanings that were deeply entwined with the fundamental values of early modern Japanese moral ideology, vendetta constitutes a unique point of access to the early modern moral imagination. I argue that this unique status enabled the literary topos of vendetta to speak powerfully to the desires and anxieties of early modern readers, constituting a site in which the demands of social obligation, the power of social norms and discourses, the moral relations of class and gender difference, and the ideologies that ordered visions of community and human relationships could be examined, affirmed, re-imagined, challenged, and critiqued, through the complex representational possibilities of literary art. Adopting a comparative approach that places texts, authors, and historical moments in dialogue and that emphasizes the involvement of these works in their broader sociocultural contexts, I explore the work performed by one of the most vital literary topoi of early modern Japan.

I begin in Chapter One by situating the vendetta fiction of the Edo period within a broader literary and discursive trajectory by identifying patterns in the formation of the vendetta topos across works that predate the founding of the Tokugawa shogunate. Exploring the ways these earlier texts imagine the figures of avenger and enemy and the status of virtuous violence, I argue that vendetta has always been characterized as possessing a disruptive potential that can unsettle orders of authority and social hierarchies, and challenge figures of power and status. In Chapter Two, I consider the early modern legacy of this critical potential by examining popular vendetta fiction's representation of the fundamental social relationships--with the household, status community, and ruling authority--that governed the constitution of selfhood in Edo Japan. Through the liminal figure of the avenger, as a character whose pursuit of vengeance affirms those relationships while temporarily loosing him from their bonds and protections, I demonstrate the ways revenge fiction re-imagined and critiqued the individual's relationship with these primary communities. In Chapter Three, I demonstrate that this critical potential of the vendetta topos could also be turned to explore and expose even moral aspects of early modern society not closely connected to revenge. By examining the ways the late 17th century author Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) uses the frame of vendetta to invert and challenge the anxieties that attended lower-class working women in contemporary discourse, I show that vendetta fiction could be a powerful site for wrestling with the moral and social contradictions wrought by the changes of a modernizing urban economy. Finally, in Chapter Four I argue that the critical potential of vendetta fiction operates not in spite of, but *through* the literary conventions that coalesce into formulaic elements during the vendetta literature boom at the turn of the 19th century. Drawing on theories of melodrama to explore the ethical-aesthetic mode that dominates



the representation of revenge in these texts, I argue that they expose the contradictions and repressions inherent in the virtues the shogunate was actively propagating in a bid to bolster its moral and political authority as part of the Kansei Reforms of 1787-1793. Throughout these chapters I seek to show the ways in which a body of popular texts that has been largely overlooked as bloodthirsty and formulaic was a critical, active agent in constituting the ways early modern authors and readers imagined and sought to understand their world.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: What We Talk About When We Talk About Vengeance:	
The Imagination of Avengers, Enemies, and Violence in Pre-Edo Vendetta Literature.....	23
Chapter Two: Revenge and Relationality:	
Vengeance and the Early Modern Self.....	78
Chapter Three: Sex and Violence, Money and Morality:	
Economies of Vengeance in the Fiction of Ihara Saikaku.....	135
Chapter Four: Virtue, Villainy, Victimization, Vengeance:	
The Melodramatic Ethics and Aesthetics of <i>Gesaku</i> Revenge Fiction.....	181
Conclusion.....	220
Bibliography.....	228

## Acknowledgments

Dissertations seem to have a way of taking longer than expected to reach completion. This one is no exception, and the long course of writing it has placed me in the debt of many people and institutions.

The project would not have been possible without the generous support of the Japan Foundation, Waseda University, and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, each of which provided funding that ultimately facilitated a total of three years of research and writing in Tokyo.

Professor Komine Kazuaki of Rikkyō University was warmly supportive and gracious with his time and expertise even as the focus of my research shifted from the medieval period (his field of specialization) to the Edo period. Professor Nakajima Takashi welcomed me into his seminar before my formal affiliation with Waseda University began, and has been unstinting in his support on multiple fronts. I have benefitted greatly--and continue to learn--from his rich expertise on Ihara Saikaku. Within Prof. Nakajima's seminar, Ōishi Azusa and Ōtomo Yūsuke in particular provided friendship and support.

In Tokyo, my thinking was aided by conversations with many friends, including Pau Pitarch Fernandez, Tom Gaubatz, Nan Ma Hartmann, Daryl Maude, Arthur Mitchell, Daniel Poch, Ariel Stilerman, and Shiho Takai. Abundant thanks to Jenny Guest for agreeing to be a writing exchange partner, and for being a wonderful friend and neighbor--I could not have asked for a better *dōkyūsei*. Many thanks to Pat Noonan for being a true comrade in the trenches of "the office," and for good friendship, discussions, and drinking sessions. And heartfelt thanks to Yumi

Kim for discussions of all varieties--often the more random the better--and for very generous feedback on my work.

I benefitted greatly from the questions, comments, and feedback I received while presenting on aspects of the dissertation at various conferences and universities. I would like to thank those who offered questions and comments at the AAS conferences in Honolulu and San Diego, the MAR-AAS conference at Princeton University, and during presentations given at UC Berkeley, CU Boulder, and the University of New Mexico. Profs. Mary Elizabeth Berry and Paula Varsano in particular took the time to speak to me one-on-one about the project, and Prof. Pamela Cheek went out of her way to offer reading recommendations that proved very fruitful.

I would like to thank Prof. Henry Smith for agreeing to serve on the defense committee after having only met me once on a bus ride, and for many helpful comments. Prof. Paul Schalow took the time to discuss this project in its early stages and offered very rich feedback once it was complete. At Columbia, I benefitted tremendously from the support of Profs. Matthew McKelway, Wiebke Denecke, and Michael Como. I have learned a vast amount from Prof. Tomi Suzuki, who has always been generous with her support and encouragement. Prof. David Lurie has been a source of inspiration, education, and friendship--and a wonderful conversation partner, on topics that often ranged very far from the topic of Japanese literature. Prof. Haruo Shirane has been unstinting in his support as a (possibly superhuman) advisor, following this project through its many incarnations and providing crucial feedback, advice, and encouragement at every step of the process.

I would like to thank my family--both its American and Japanese sides--for many years of love and encouragement, even as I struggled with this project and the path I have chosen. In

particular, my sincere thanks to the Tsuneda family, without whose support--in so many different forms--our years in Tokyo would not have been possible.

Finally, a very special thank you to Michiko, for love, support, and companionship even at times that were not easy, and to Yuma, for reminding me what really matters.

## Introduction

### Opening: An Extraordinary Incident in the Court of Siam

The journal of Peter Floris, a Dutchman who traveled to what are now called South and Southeast Asia in a voyage spanning 1611-1615, records, in a description of the history of Siam, the following incident, which is glossed in the margin with the subtitle, "280 Japan slaves take the court and King of Siam into their power." The incident, if true, must have taken place sometime between 1610 and 1612:

This White King deceasing, this present King, being his second sone, succeeded in the kingdome; who forthwith was instigated to dispatche the foresayde Jockrommewaye oute of the waye, as afterwards it happened. This foresayd Jockrommewaye, among his slaves, had about 280 Japanders; these, after their master's death, thinking to revenge theyr master's death, and to do some valiant Romane facte, ranne joyntly together to the court of this yonge King, who was withoute any suche suspition. They tooke the court and gotte the King into theyr handes, whome they compelled to deliver into theyre hands 4 of his principall nobles for to be slayne, as being the causers of theyr masters death...and so they departed with a greate treasure, using much violence att theyr departure. To which things they of Siam knew no other remedy than to sitte still and looke on.<sup>1</sup>

The Japanese men Floris refers to as "slaves" were in fact more likely attendants, retainers, or bodyguards of the scheming courtier referred to here as Jockrommewaye; from the 16th century there had been a sizable Japanese community in Ayutthaya, and it appears that some of them entered the employ of Siamese nobles.<sup>2</sup> When this master was executed in a purge upon the ascension of a new Siamese king, these Japanese attacked the court in the name of revenge, demanding that four ministers they considered responsible for their master's execution be put to

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Floris, *Peter Floris: His Voyage to the East Indies in the Globe 1611-1615, The Contemporary Translation of his Journal*, ed. by W.H. Moreland (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1934), 56.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, at least some members of this community held court titles themselves, the most famous example being Yamada Nagamasa (?-1630), who was granted considerably high rank. On the Japanese community in Ayutthaya, see Ishii Yoneo and Yoshikawa Toshiharu, *Nichi-Tai kōryū no roppyakunen shi* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1987), 50-70.

death. While the incident has not played into the rich lore of Japanese revenge (the men are thought to have met with the king's violence near present-day Bangkok shortly thereafter, their story apparently never making it back to Japan), it represents one of the more spectacular historical manifestations of the practice known in Japanese as *katakiuchi*, the act of exacting blood vengeance for the death of a senior family member or master.<sup>3</sup>

*Katakiuchi*, or "vendetta" as I refer to it in this dissertation, already possessed a long and complex history in practice and discourse in the Japanese archipelago by the time the "280 Japanders" committed their "Romane facte" in the court of Siam.<sup>4</sup> References to it are found in the earliest imperial Japanese mytho-histories, the *Kojiki* (712) and the *Nihon shoki* (720), where it is explicitly linked to the Confucian virtue of filial piety, with an ideological grounding in ancient Chinese Confucian texts. The dramatic vendetta of the Soga brothers, Jūrō (1172-1193) and Gorō (1174-1193), who avenged their father's death in the hunting encampment of the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199) in 1193, became a rich source for works of dramatic and prose literature throughout the following centuries, and other works of vendetta fiction and drama appeared throughout the two centuries prior to the revenge of the "Japanders" in Ayutthaya. At some point in its history, the ideology of Japanese vendetta expanded beyond the family and the virtue of filial piety, to include as well the virtue of loyalty to a lord or master;

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<sup>3</sup> The fact that the "Japanders" appear to have ransacked part of the city and "departed with a greate treasure" suggests that they saw an opportunity for personal gain from an already tumultuous political situation within the court; revenge on behalf of their Siamese master may have thus served as the justification for a broader series of violent acts.

<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to use the term "vendetta" in part because it is already in frequent use in scholarship as the translation of "katakiuchi," and also because it has the effect of marking a *practice*, one with a specificity that is not expressed by the more conceptual, broader term "revenge." As will become clear in the dissertation, Japanese vendetta has its own complex ideological history and norms; my use of the term "vendetta" is *not* intended to suggest a precise correspondence with the southern European practices with which the word is perhaps most closely associated. One possible nuance of the term "vendetta" that notably does not apply to the Japanese practice is the sense of an ongoing feud, a repeated cycle of revenges back and forth over a long period of time. When I refer to a vendetta in this dissertation, unless otherwise specified, I mean to indicate a single act of lethal revenge in return for a specific act of murder.

reference to vengeance on behalf of a slain master appears already in the fourteenth century miscellany *Tsurezuregusa*.<sup>5</sup> We possess few records for the historical practice of vendetta prior to the seventeenth century, but by the mid-sixteenth century domain lords were writing into their domain laws stipulations concerning the proper practice of vendetta, suggesting that at the time the "280 Japanders" carried out their act in Siam, acts of revenge were by no means unheard of in the Japanese archipelago.

### **Vendetta in Practice and Print in Edo Japan**

Coincidentally, the dramatic vendetta in the Siamese court is contemporaneous with the beginning of a new and highly unique chapter in the history of Japanese vendetta practice and its representation. The vendetta took place around the end of the first decade of Tokugawa hegemony in Japan. The unity of the archipelago under Tokugawa authority inaugurated a series of dramatic social and political changes, and ushered in nearly two-and-a-half centuries of relative peace, which lasted until the upheavals and transformations that culminated in the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Although the realm was administered during these centuries by the warrior class, the authorities placed a premium on the maintenance of order; compared to the turmoil of the previous centuries, warrior bloodshed was rare. One of the few exceptions was the act of vendetta. Vendetta during the years of Tokugawa rule received official sanction; under specific circumstances, it was legal for a junior family member to avenge the murder of a senior family member through an act of blood vengeance. The practice was not only legal, it was supported and regulated by a bureaucratic procedural apparatus involving approval, registration, and formal

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<sup>5</sup> See Yoshida Kenkō, *Tsurezuregusa*, in Satake Akihiro and Kubota Jun, eds., *Hōjōki Tsurezuregusa*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 39 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 190; I discuss *Tsurezuregusa* in Chapter One.



investigation. A would-be avenger was expected to request official permission of the shogunal authorities, usually through the intercession of his local domain authorities, to embark upon a vendetta. The avenger's name would be registered with the shogunate, and the aftermath of the killing (assuming it was eventually carried out with success) would be thoroughly investigated, but the successful avenger would not be treated as a murderer. Indeed, a successful avenger was much more likely to be celebrated by authorities and peers alike as an exemplar of filial piety. Over one hundred successful vendettas were carried out during the nearly 270 years of Tokugawa rule.<sup>6</sup> Initially avengers came almost exclusively from the samurai class, but in the second half of the Edo period vendetta came to be practiced by members of all classes.

The founding of the Tokugawa shogunate also coincided with the inception of popular printing, which flourished in the urban centers that grew dramatically in the decades and centuries that followed. New theatrical forms as well, most notably the *jōruri* puppet theater and *kabuki*, came into being and thrived in the cities. The representation of vendetta found a home on the stage and the page that dramatically exceeded that of the preceding centuries. Against the historical backdrop of the authorities' relatively permissive attitude towards blood vengeance, revenge stories burgeoned in the new world of popular fiction, beginning in the late seventeenth century and reaching a peak around the turn of the nineteenth. Revenge narratives appeared throughout the forest of new genres that arose in the print fiction world, most notably in the genres of *kana-zōshi*, *ukiyo-zōshi*, *kibyōshi*, *gōkan*, and *yomihon*; some of these narratives were inspired by actual vendetta incidents, but many more were works of pure fiction. At the same time, revenge became a fundamental element of the stage. Beginning in the early eighteenth

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<sup>6</sup> For an comprehensive table of vendetta incidents throughout the Edo period, see Hiraide Kōjirō, *Katakiuchi*, (Tokyo: Bunshōkaku, 1909). Reprint in Chūkō bunko series. (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1990), 99-106. Page references are to the 1990 edition.

century, the New Year in Edo always commenced with kabuki performances of plays based upon the medieval vendetta of the Soga brothers, and revenge plots, inspired by real events or purely fictional, became a staple feature of numerous kabuki plays. Revenge was also to be found elsewhere in the world of representation. News of contemporary vendetta incidents, often altered for dramatic effect and embellished with illustrations depicting the killing itself, circulated in the form of cheap broadsheets (*yomiuri* or *kawaraban*), which were hawked in the streets.

Woodblock printed *ukiyo-e* illustrations included vendetta (and its kabuki representations) among their themes. Revenge could be found providing material for even more ephemeral media: by the mid-nineteenth century, for example, one could purchase a chart of the most famous vendettas of Japanese history, pitted against one another in the form of a sheet of *sumō* rankings (*banzuke*).<sup>7</sup>

### The Literary Imagination of Virtuous Revenge

The Edo period was an age in which Japan itself looked inward in new ways, using new technologies of representation. A few decades after the revenge of the 280 "Japanders" in Ayutthaya, it would have been impossible for Japanese to travel to Siam--or anywhere outside the Japanese archipelago--at all.<sup>8</sup> And had the avengers committed their act on Japanese soil--a massive attack in the name of revenge, enacted by loyal retainers against high ranking figures of the institutes of power--it would not have faded into obscurity, meriting only a footnote in the journal of a (still likely Dutch) trader, but would have thrived in multiple media: manuscript,

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<sup>7</sup> See Hiraide Kōjirō, *Katakiuchi* (Tokyo: Bunshōkaku, 1909). Reprint in Chūkō bunko series (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1990), 96-97. Page reference are to the 1990 edition.

<sup>8</sup> Siamese boats (including vessels belonging to the court) would, in fact, continue to land at Nagasaki--the one Japanese port that remained open to foreign trade--under the permitted category of *karabune*, or "Chinese boats," and piloted by Chinese crews. See Kakizaki Ichirō, *Monogatari Tai no rekishi: hohoemi no kuni no jissō*, Chūkō shinsho 1913 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 2007), 64.

print, theater, broadsheets, poster art, and all variety of retellings and re-imaginings for a wide audience, constituting itself an element of shared and self-reflexive culture. Indeed, when forty-seven avengers from the Akō domain carried out a similar act of vengeance against a high-ranking official in the name of loyalty in the shogunal capital of Edo less than a century later (1702), that is precisely the treatment it received--and in many ways continues to receive--in the diverse forms of cultural production now generically grouped under the name *Chūshingura* (*Treasury of Loyal Retainers*, after the title of the most famous play inspired by the incident).

Incidents of blood revenge were a source of excitement and curiosity, but the imagination and creativity that surrounded the representation of revenge was not simply a matter of morbid fascination with violence in an age of peace. Revenge carried a symbolic power as an auspicious act, a dramatic enactment of self-sacrifice on behalf of filial piety (*kō*) and in some cases loyalty (*chū*)--two of the most charged virtues of the period's moral ideology. The violence of vendetta was a virtuous violence, and a celebratory air came to attach to it. The original medieval version of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers* is pervaded with gloom, and emphasizes emotional torment and the ephemerality of human life, but the Edo period tradition of mounting Soga-inspired plays at the New Year reflected a desire to launch the year on an auspicious note, with works that emphasized the success of the brothers' quest to avenge their father. It may be tempting today to associate revenge with bloodthirstiness and wild, uncivilized justice on the one hand, and with emotional torment and questioning (as in *Hamlet*) on the other, but proper revenge in the popular imagination of the Edo period signified something auspicious and largely unproblematic, a sign of virtue achieved in the most dramatic way possible. Not only did it become conventional during the Edo period to conclude works of vendetta fiction with scenes of auspicious

celebration, but in reality as well, successful avengers were in many ways rewarded and celebrated in the wake of their acts of killing, as moral exemplars.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the nature of the revenge plot itself, with its narrative demands and possibilities, offered rich material for representation and for meanings beyond the purely celebratory. Reading the revenge literature of Edo Japan, we have the opportunity to acquire insight into the ways writers and readers of the early modern period imagined such things as heroism and exemplarity; transgression, punishment, and justice; the norms and boundaries of human community; and the entwined and complicated forces of emotion and morality. A revenge story requires an initial murder, and this murder may in turn be shaped by generic conventions of one sort or another. Yet the way any particular story constructs that murder, depicts the character of the murderer and of the avenger who will kill him in turn, and imagines the broader community's reaction to each killing, offers us admission to a thought-world training its attention on fundamental questions of community, morality, and humanity. Close attention to the ways it creates its meanings around these questions, through linguistic (and sometimes visual) media rich with possibilities for expression and representation, can reveal a sophisticated--and at times unexpected--imagination of these issues in what might at first glance appear to be "mere" works of popular entertainment.

### **Argument of the Dissertation**

It is this world of imagination that I seek to explore in this dissertation. Vendetta possessed a unique status during the Edo period, as an act of morally virtuous life-or-death

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<sup>9</sup> The celebration of successful avengers often extended to semi-fictionalized representation of their acts in various media; however, it also included material and monetary reward from their domain lords, and granted them social capital in the eyes of their communities.

violence, charged with meanings that were deeply entwined with fundamental values of early modern Japanese moral ideology. I argue that this unique status enabled the literary topos of vendetta to speak powerfully to the desires and anxieties of early modern readers, constituting a site wherein the demands of social obligation, the power of social norms and discourses, the moral relations of class and gender difference, and the ideologies that ordered visions of community and ideal human relationships could be examined, affirmed, re-imagined, challenged, and critiqued through the complex representational medium of literary art. My characterization of vendetta fiction as a site for the moral imagination may suggest mere fancy or fantasy--thought reflecting playfully, without concrete consequence, upon the "real" world. Indeed, these are not political tracts or philosophical treatises--they are works intended for consumption as entertainment; yet to dismiss them as therefore ephemeral or passive would be a mistake. It is important to view these texts not as a reflection, or a superstructure, or a transparent repository of entertainment, but as active agents in the constitution of culture, thought, discourse, and ideology.<sup>10</sup> When a revenge tale presents upright characters caught in the double bind of mutually exclusive moral demands, the text is not simply invoking moral discourses taken from elsewhere--official moral ideology, philosophical tracts, or educational primers--and reacting to them; it is participating in their creation, and in the creation of new understandings and possibilities within them. When Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693) uses his nuanced mastery of the written word to construct a virtuous, avenging heroine from the figure of a low-class working woman, it is not simply a playful inversion of established hierarchies within a system of narrative and aesthetic conventions; it is also the creation of a new way of seeing, both within and beyond

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<sup>10</sup> In my thinking about the importance of viewing works of popular fiction as social agents unto themselves, I am indebted to the work of Roddey Reid. See his *Families in Jeopardy: Regulating the Social Body in France, 1750-1910* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), particularly the Introduction, pp. 1-19.

the bounds of textual representation. When a heavily illustrated revenge tale by Santō Kyōden (1761-1816) employs the sophisticated, allusive possibilities of the written word and the visual image to entangle the reader emotionally in the sufferings and moral crises of fictional avengers, it participates in the creation of emotional communities, moral meanings, and human experience. It becomes a site where moral concepts meet emotional experience and take on life, as animated elements of a shared and dynamic culture.

Many elements clearly influenced the actions of the 280 "Japanders" in Siam: political realities and ambitions, material avarice ("and so they departed with a greate treasure"), personal histories, power relations within the group itself, a specific relationship to weaponry and to the employment of violence. Yet certainly no less at play were the stories they told themselves: stories of revenge, its meaning, its successes, its values--enough so that their representation of their own attack as an act of revenge remained coherent even when related, secondhand, to a traveler from a distant land. In the Edo period, with its increased literacy, its large urban communities, its dramatically intensified circulation of goods, people, and ideas, its new technologies of representation and textual reproduction, and its rapidly expanding populations of consumers for representations on the page and the stage, stories--including stories of revenge--took shape and traveled in new and expansive ways, and often with remarkable sophistication and nuance. As they did so, they not only reflected, but participated in the creation of early modern Japanese culture--in the constitution of ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking.

## Organization of the Dissertation

Vendetta works form a crucial, if often overlooked, segment of the major Edo fiction genres of *ukiyo-zōshi*, *kibyōshi*, *gōkan*, and *yomihon*, and they were penned by such diverse authors as Asai Ryōi (?-1691), Ihara Saikaku, Ueda Akinari (1734-1809), Santō Kyōden, Jippensha Ikku (1765-1831), Kyokutei Bakin (1767-1848), Shikitei Sanba (1776-1822), and Tamenaga Shunsui (1790-1843). These works, authors, and genres span the Edo period, and among the wide body of vendetta works, there are accordingly significant differences in intended audience, language, narrative mode, relationship to the theater, role of illustration, and broader cultural and political context. The concept of virtuous vendetta, moreover, is not limited to the Edo period, but takes its ideological roots from ancient Chinese texts and first appears in Japanese writings as early as the ancient period, in the eighth century histories *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. I discuss this diverse body through an approach that acknowledges both their cohesion and their difference, seeking to understand individual works with attention to the specificity of text and historical moment, but also mapping larger connections, trends, and patterns in the literary imagination of vendetta across a broader expanse of literary and social history. To this end, the structure of the dissertation follows a general progression from diachrony to synchrony. Chapter One seeks to situate early modern vendetta fiction within a much wider historical and discursive context that reaches back to the ancient period; Chapter Two focuses on the Edo period in full, placing texts from the early and late Edo period in dialogue; Chapter Three focuses on the 17th century, the Edo period's first century; and the fourth chapter focuses specifically upon the late Edo vendetta boom in popular *gesaku* literature at the turn of the 19th century.

My first chapter, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Vengeance: Avengers, Enemies, and Violence in Pre-Edo Vendetta Literature,” situates the revenge fiction of the Edo period within a broader literary and discursive history, by focusing on works of vendetta literature that predate the founding of the Tokugawa shogunate. Examining a broad body of works of fiction, drama, and narrative history dating from as early as the eighth century, I seek to discern, amidst much flux and transformation, broader patterns in the literary imagination of revenge as it took shape over the course of centuries. These patterns are among the fundamental materials out of which early modern authors would craft their own literary imagination of revenge, as participants in a dynamic but remarkably coherent tradition. Opening the chapter with a discussion of the ideological basis for the imagination of vendetta as a morally sound act, I organize the chapter around three specific avenues of inquiry: I examine the ways pre-Edo texts imagine the disruptive violence of virtuous vengeance in relation to the representation of authority and social order; I explore the construction of the figure of the avenger, as the agent of virtuous violence; and I consider the role of transgression in the construction of the figure of the enemy. I argue that in these premodern works we see a pattern of concern with the potential of virtuous revenge to disrupt or challenge existing orders and hierarchies, and a consistent construction of the avenger as a figure standing simultaneously within and apart from the everyday social order. As we shall see in the chapters to follow, these are elements that will continue to inflect the imagination of vendetta--and contribute to its critical potential--throughout the Edo period.

My second chapter, “Revenge and Relationality: Vengeance and the Early Modern Self,” turns to the Edo period, examining revenge literature from the years of Tokugawa rule in terms



of the fundamental social relationships--with the household, status community, and ruling authority--that governed the constitution of selfhood in early modern Japan. I begin by arguing that vendetta, as an historical practice and as a plot structure, stands in unique relation to these relationships, in that it simultaneously affirms their validity while temporarily liberating the avenger--who may travel far from his home community in search of his enemy--from their immediate bonds. Examining texts by Ihara Saikaku and Ueda Akinari in which the act of vendetta is in some way questioned, and contrasting them with a modern vendetta story by Kikuchi Kan published in 1919, I argue that much of the drama of early modern vendetta fiction lies in placing different versions of the social self into conflict and requiring the protagonist to choose among them; in this way vendetta fiction constitutes a site wherein the relational bounds of the self may be questioned, reaffirmed, or actively critiqued. I conclude the chapter with an examination of a text by Santō Kyōden, in which I consider the appeal of a very different vengeful figure in Edo literature, one unrestrained by social relationships and thus both radically free and morally lost: the ghost.

In Chapter Three, "Sex and Violence, Money and Morality: Economies of Vengeance in the Fiction of Ihara Saikaku," my focus narrows to the late 17th century and to the vendetta works authored by the popular writer Ihara Saikaku, but also expands outward to consider the ways vendetta literature can speak to elements of its early modern moment not explicitly connected to revenge. Specifically, I examine Saikaku's portrayal of lower-class working women in his vendetta fiction. Integrated into a new urban workforce that absented them from the control and surveillance of the household, such women were a source of moral anxiety in late 17th century discourse, which portrayed them as morally dubious and sexually available. I argue

that Saikaku's treatment of the female characters in these vendetta tales problematizes these negative moral assumptions through sophisticated, sympathetic narratives that elevate these figures morally while pointing to the moral and social contradictions of the economy in which they participate. The role of vendetta within this narrative dynamic, as a morally-charged practice in which life and death hang in the balance, serves to push the moral ironies of the narratives to their extremes, thereby bringing the contradictions that surround lower-class working women into sharp relief and providing a fresh angle of approach to themes that are ultimately pervasive throughout Saikaku's work. Through this approach, I seek to understand the ways in which the topos of vendetta could be a powerful site that was good to think with--even when the subject under consideration was not necessarily revenge itself.

Chapter Four, "Virtue, Villainy, Victimization, Vengeance: The Melodramatic Ethics and Aesthetics of *Gesaku* Revenge Fiction," shifts to the late Edo period, to the boom in vendetta narratives in the body of popular genres known as *gesaku* at the turn of the 19th century. By this time the conventions of vendetta fiction had become firmly established, the plots highly formulaic; I seek to understand the logic underlying these formulaic elements and the ways they could speak to broader aspects of their sociocultural moment. Specifically, I draw upon theories of melodrama to explore these conventional elements as aspects of an ethical-aesthetic mode that continued to dominate aspects of *gesaku* even after the specific fad for revenge narratives died away. *Gesaku* vendetta narratives are dramas of virtue; the relationship between avenger and enemy is presented as a morally polarized conflict between good and evil, and the texts inevitably end--after many twists and turns--with the recognition and affirmation of virtue and the expulsion of villainy. I argue that the moral legibility of these texts extends to the underside

of virtue, and that their drama often lies in their revelation of the contradictions and repressions inherent in contemporary moral discourses of filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, and female chastity, virtues the shogunate was actively propagating in a bid to bolster its political authority as part of the Kansei Reforms of 1787-1793. I explore the ways in which the imaginative world of the texts opens up new possibilities for the shape of virtue, particularly through the depiction of virtuous yet fantastic characters who do not fit the human social order of mainstream moral discourse, thus suggesting alternative possibilities for moral integrity and human community. I conclude by considering the role of money in the rise of this melodramatic mode, seeking a link between the desire for moral legibility and the social transformations effected by the growth of a commercial economy.

In the interest of practicability, I have elected to focus my analyses in these chapters almost exclusively on print fiction, and not to incorporate the vast corpus of early modern theatrical works in which vendetta plays a significant role; only in Chapter One, which focuses on the much smaller body of extant pre-Edo vendetta works, do I give any direct attention to works (specifically, *nō* plays) written for the stage. Edo popular fiction was, however, intimately connected to the theater in its themes, content, and modes of representation; I will allude to this relationship in contextualizing my discussion in Chapter Four. I have also chosen not to discuss works based upon or inspired by the revenge of the Akō *ronin* in this dissertation. An officially unsanctioned vendetta, the Akō incident involved the revenge of retainers for a death sentence imposed upon their lord as punishment, rather than the vengeance of family members upon a murderer, and it ended with the punishment of the avengers. In these senses, it was in many ways an anomaly by the standards of early modern vendetta proper, and indeed the incident can be

considered to constitute a topos unto itself within Edo literature, distinct from the vendetta works I discuss here. It has also come to receive extensive scholarly attention, whereas the works I seek to examine here are ones that--despite their popularity during the Edo period--have been largely overlooked by modern scholarship. It is to these works, and to the specific conception of vendetta they represent, that I have chosen to devote my attentions in this project, though I trust that some of my arguments here will be of relevance in considering *Chūshingura* works as well.

### **Scholarship on Vendetta Literature and Practice**

Japanese and English-language scholarship on vendetta fiction remains in an embryonic state; while studies of individual texts abound, there are few works of scholarship that attempt to examine vendetta fiction as a general phenomenon, within a comprehensive and comparative framework. With the exception of work on the Akō Incident and *Chūshingura* literature, English-language scholarship on vendetta remains quite limited. The works that do exist primarily focus on the theater, as in the work of Lawrence Kominz, which traces the rich theatrical legacy of the revenge of the Soga brothers over the centuries, and in Kevin Wetmore's edited volume *Revenge Drama in European Renaissance and Japanese Theater: From Hamlet to Madame Butterfly*, which assembles articles on revenge in Japanese theater, some of them in a comparative framework with European works, and many of them about *Chūshingura*.<sup>11</sup> A 1976 article by Douglas Mills provides a thorough introduction to the history of Japanese vendetta discourse and

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<sup>11</sup> Laurence R. Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance: Japanese Drama and the Soga Literary Tradition*, (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1995), and Kevin J. Wetmore, *Revenge Drama in European Renaissance and Japanese Theater: from Hamlet to Madame Butterfly* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

practice, but does not give any attention to vendetta's literary representation.<sup>12</sup> One of the few works of scholarship to examine Edo period vendetta literature beyond the realm of the theater is Drake Langford's 2009 dissertation "The Violent Virtue: First Narratives of the Ishii Brothers' Late Genroku Katakuchi," which incorporates historical accounts and popular fiction into a comparative framework; the project, however, confines its scope to early representations of one specific vendetta incident, the so-called Kameyama vendetta carried out in 1701.<sup>13</sup> Of the premodern and early modern vendetta narratives I examine in my project, none, with the exception of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, has to my knowledge received critical attention in English.

Japanese-language scholarship on vendetta literature is more developed, though works attempting to examine vendetta literature as an overarching, coherent phenomenon remain startlingly few. Indeed, the majority of works that attempt a comprehensive treatment of vendetta treat the historical practice rather than its fictional representation. Of these, the classic work remains Hiraide Kōjirō's *Katakuchi*, first published in 1909, which traces the origins and regulation of the practice and assembles considerable material on specific incidents from throughout the Edo period.<sup>14</sup> More recent comprehensive works on vendetta practice include Ujiie Mikito's *Katakuchi: fukushū no sahō*, and parts of Taniguchi Shinko's *Bushidō kō: kenka, katakuchi, bureiuchi*, the latter of which makes some crossover into the world of literature through an attempt to examine and critique Ihara Saikaku's vendetta tales from an historical

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<sup>12</sup> D. E. Mills, "Kataki-Uchi: The Practice of Blood-Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 4 (1976): 525-542.

<sup>13</sup> Langford, Drake. "The Violent Virtue: First Narratives of the Ishii Brothers' Late Genroku Katakuchi." PhD dissertation. Yale University, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Hiraide Kōjirō, *Katakuchi*, [1909], 1990.

perspective.<sup>15</sup> A more creative attempt to bridge the distance between literature and history is Maruya Saiichi's *Chūshingura to wa nani ka*, in which the author argues that the attack of the Akō *rōnin* must itself be read as a literary event, one that draws its tropes in part from the literature surrounding the Soga brothers.<sup>16</sup> Scholarship pertaining explicitly to vendetta literature (as opposed to practice) within a comprehensive framework is extremely limited. There are two notable exceptions. One is Yamagishi Tokuhei's lengthy 1927 article "Katakiuchi bungaku to shite no *Soga monogatari*," which attempts to situate the *Tale of the Soga Brothers* within a much lengthier history of Japanese vendetta literature; while rich in information, however, the article constitutes more of an in-depth overview of works than a critical analysis.<sup>17</sup> The other is Konita Seiji's brief but suggestive 1989 article "Adauchi shōsetsu shiron," in which the author attempts to identify an underlying set of structures to premodern and early modern vendetta literature, and to speculate on the meanings we can derive from their patterns.<sup>18</sup> I discuss this article at greater length in Chapter Two. There have also been a number of articles that focus primarily upon one literary work, but theorize its position in relation to the broader history of vendetta literature. A particularly strong and thought-provoking example is Yano Kimio's "*Budō denraiki* no sekai: seido ni fūjikomerareta jōnen," which reads Saikaku's 1687 work *Budō denraiki* against a wide range of works of vendetta literature from the centuries prior to the Edo period.<sup>19</sup> Another

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<sup>15</sup> Ujiie Mikito, *Katakiuchi: fukushū no sahō*, Chūkō shinsho 1883 (Tokyo: Chūō kōron shinsha, 2007), and Taniguchi Shinko, *Bushidō kō: kenka, katakiuchi, bureiuchi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa gakugei shuppan, 2007). Taniguchi's analysis of Saikaku is on 167-192.

<sup>16</sup> Maruya Saiichi. *Chūshingura to wa nani ka*. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984.

<sup>17</sup> Yamagishi Tokuhei, "Katakiuchi bungaku to shiteto shite no *Soga monogatari*," *Nihon bungaku renkō: chūsei* (Tokyo: Chūkōkan, 1927).

<sup>18</sup> Konita Seiji, "Adauchi shōsetsu shiron," *Nihon bungaku* 38, no. 5 (1989): 75-83.

<sup>19</sup> Yano Kimio, "*Budō denraiki* no sekai: seido ni fūjikomerareta jōnen," *Saikaku ron* (Wakakusa shobō, 2003), 285-313.

example is Saeki Shin'ichi's "Fukushū no ronri: *Soga monogatari* to katakiuchi," which works through a wide array of vendetta texts to draw attention to the fundamental differences in moral ideology underlying vendetta in the *Tale of the Soga Brothers* versus later Edo vendetta literature; I draw upon Saeki's arguments in Chapter One.<sup>20</sup> In addition to these works, there are numerous scholarly articles that examine individual works of vendetta fiction; many of these, however, do so without any particular focus on the issue of revenge itself, instead attempting to understand where the work fits into its author's larger oeuvre, for example, or explicating details of the text that have little connection to the larger vendetta theme. Articles that I have found particularly useful for their discussions of individual works of vendetta fiction examined in this dissertation will be referenced throughout the following chapters.

### **Addendum: The Question of Early Modernity**

It is necessary at this point to include a note regarding my use of the term "early modern" throughout the dissertation in referencing the Edo period, the span of centuries that comprises the primary focus of this project. The term "modernity" is itself overdetermined, ambiguous, and contested, and adding the word "early" contributes, at the very least, an extra dimension of confusion. Indeed, it is worth questioning whether the concept of modernity has any analytical value at all, when it is invoked in so many different forms, many of them incompatible with one another. As Frederick Cooper notes, academic discourse on modernity depicts it, from certain perspectives, as a singular, Western European project (with positive or negative valences and relationships to the rest of the world), and from another perspective as "plural," with "multiple

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<sup>20</sup> Saeki Shin'ichi, "Fukushū no ronri: *Soga monogatari* to katakiuchi," *Kyōto gobun* 11 (2004), 4-22.

modernities' and 'alternative modernities.'" He goes on to argue that "it is not clear why an alternative modernity should be called a modernity at all. If any form of innovation produces a modernity, then the term has little analytic purchase."<sup>21</sup> Part of the conceptual confusion of modernity, and of the question of multiple "early modernities" in particular, is the problem of conceptual slippage between "modernization" and "modernity." Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that these constitute "two separate projects that are symbiotically connected":

One refers to processes of building the institutions (from parliamentary and legal institution [sic] to roads, capitalist businesses, and factories) that are invoked when we speak of modernization. The other refers to the development of a degree of reflective, judgmental thinking about these processes. The latter is what is often invoked by "modernity."<sup>22</sup>

There is no question that Japan in the Edo period underwent a dramatic experience of changes that can be characterized with the term *modernization*: from the establishment of new systems of administration, to significant demographic growth and the rise of large cities, to the rise of an increasingly complex market economy, involvement (however formally restricted) in global trade, the construction of a sophisticated series of national highways, and--directly relevant to the production of literature--the embrace and development of print technologies that made possible

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<sup>21</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Modernity," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*: 113-149 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). Cooper's outline of what he defines as the four fundamental academic perspectives on modernity is on 113-114; the lines quoted are found on 114. To Cooper's mention of "multiple modernities" and "alternative modernities," we may add David Wang's sophisticated (and specifically literary) concept of "repressed modernities," which Wang uses to discuss the popular fiction of late Qing China. Wang uses the term to point in multiple directions at once, giving it a spatio-temporal significance connected to modernization (for the first time, Chinese fiction was involved in a "global" context of literary production via dramatically increased contact with the West, and its innovations emerged from this context); suggesting complicated involvement (often as something worked *against*) in the first Chinese literature self-consciously to term itself "modern" in the early 20th century; and pointing to a plural sense of "incipient modernities" which "competed for fulfillment" in the late Qing moment. See David Der-Wei Wang, *Fin-de-Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1849-1911* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 18-23.

<sup>22</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June, 2011): 663-675. The quotation is found on p. 669. For two more examinations of the confusions attending the concept of "early modernity," see Randolph Starn, "The Early Modern Muddle," *Journal of Early Modern History* 6, no. 3 (2002): 296-307 (from which Chakrabarty derives his title), and Jack A. Goldstone, "The Problem of the 'Early Modern' World," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 41, no. 3 (1998): 249-284. See also the articles collected in the special issue of *Daedalus* dedicated to "Early Modernities," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998).



new and complex means of representation. Clearly the 17th through mid-19th centuries saw a number of rapid and thorough transformations that made many aspects of life in the archipelago significantly different from anything that had come before. Yet to ask whether these modernizations (of which I have listed only a handful) ushered in the beginning of something called *modernity* (early, alternative, or otherwise) leads us into murky waters. Not only does it not clear up the question of what, precisely, modernity is, but it begs the question of when modernity is considered as actually arriving, and it risks suggesting either a teleological trajectory leading up to that ambiguous moment (usually linked in some form to the dramatic mid-19th century encounter with the West), or an "alternative," non-European modernity that was broken off midway (as a result of that encounter)--again raising Cooper's question of the "analytic purchase" of the term modernity to begin with.

Despite these thorny conceptual and terminological issues, I persist in employing the term "early modern" in this project as interchangeable with "Edo period." Why? There are, of course, the simple matters that the term has become largely conventional in English writing on Edo Japan, and that it forms a convenient (if problematic) gloss for the conventional Japanese term *kinsei*.<sup>23</sup> More than either of these, however, I am motivated by the various invitations that the use of the term enables. In the words of Jason Scott-Warren, a scholar of early modern English literature, the term early modern "has always been more of a question than an answer, a way of keeping open the fascinating and unavoidable issue of how the distant past matters to us, whilst acknowledging that it might in certain ways prove unsettlingly alien and self-enclosed."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For the conventional use of the "early modern" to refer to the Edo period, one need look no further than Conrad Totman's textbook on Edo period history, titled *Early Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Totman, however, does not specifically address his choice of the term "early modern" to describe the period.

<sup>24</sup> Jason Scott-Warren, *Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 15.

Provided we are conscientious about the teleological dangers of the term, and employ it as a question rather than an answer, "early modern" marks an invitation to examine the years of Tokugawa rule in open dialogue with what comes after--as well as with what comes before. In the field of Japanese literary studies, where period boundaries have been rather too sharply drawn, this invitation can only be welcome.<sup>25</sup> Even more appealing to me is the invitation the term invites to comparison with other places, moments, and literatures that have likewise been termed "early modern" by scholars. Japan was not the only place in the world to undergo a series of rapid modernizations between the 16th and 19th centuries; as Sheldon Pollock notes in his consideration of the value of the concept of early modernity, during that time dramatic transformations affected "the world as a whole":

We are therefore completely justified in seeking to understand how variegated the world was at the moment before what would become the dominant form of modernity--colonial, capitalist, Western--achieved global ascendancy, even if that question can be posed only in the moment after....Since the material world changed dramatically during the few centuries prior to this threshold moment, and changed universally, there is good reason to ask how the systems devised for knowing the world responded--or indeed why they failed to respond if they failed--to the world that was changing objectively between these dates.<sup>26</sup>

Pollock goes on to emphasize that there is no reason to expect uniformity of experience, or to lament it if it is not found; nor is the point to go looking for germs of European-style modernity. The point is simply to understand how ways of thinking and knowing reacted to a world that was rapidly transforming at a global level. While this dissertation focuses almost exclusively on the

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<sup>25</sup> For an insightful analysis of the ways in which the Edo period continues to be evoked as a site of Japanese "tradition" and is thereby involved in the construction of different conceptions of Japanese modernity, see Carol Gluck, "The Invention of Edo," in Stephen Vlastos, ed., *Mirror of Modernity: Invented Traditions of Modern Japan*: 262-284 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500-1800* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 3-4.

case of Japan, and on one very specific system for "knowing the world"--popular fiction--the term "early modern" leaves open that comparative invitation, that question, that encourages us to read these texts as one of many ways of knowing a changing world.

When I use the term "early modern" in this dissertation, therefore, it should be understood, at its most basic level, as a term generically interchangeable with the far more neutral "Edo period," but retaining and reminding us of the sense of comparative potential inherent in the material and contexts I am examining, beyond the boundaries of moment and place. The "modern" part of "early modern" in my usage, moreover, should be understood not as pointing to some essential concept of "modernity," however defined, but to the very real and verifiable elements of modernization--such as the dramatic transformations outlined above--that were tangible and defining elements of life during the Edo period, and which can be understood as local manifestations of a general experience of rapid change that affected most of the globe during the same centuries. As we shall see, such modernizations form a subtext for many of the works of vendetta fiction I will discuss in the chapters to follow.

## Chapter One:

### What We Talk About When We Talk About Vengeance: The Imagination of Avengers, Enemies, and Violence in Pre-Edo Vendetta Literature

“The word ‘revenge’ is said so quickly, it almost seems as if it could not contain more than one root concept and feeling. And so people are still trying to find this root....As if all words were not pockets into which now this and now that has been put, and now many things at once! Thus ‘revenge,’ too, is now this and now that, and now something very composite.” --Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>27</sup>

Yōtarō is uneasy. Something doesn't feel right. Yes, his father was murdered by a fellow samurai, which certainly was a terrible turn of events--but Yōtarō had killed the samurai at once, avenging his father within mere *minutes* of his father's death. (It helped that the murderer had immediately repented and promptly offered himself up to Yōtarō to be killed.) The lord and senior retainers of the domain had all marveled at this "on-site" vendetta and praised and rewarded Yōtarō, seeing in his act signs of good fortune, filial spirit, and divine protection. And yet...Yōtarō feels that something is missing.

要太郎つくづく思ふに、昔よりの敵討の本を見るに、主親の敵を討つには、野に伏し山に伏し、身をこつかに砕き、娘・女房を君傾城に売り、無念を堪へ身を忍び、貧に厭わず、哀れな目にも遇い、悲しき目をもして敵を討つゆへ、忠孝にもなれども、我は父を討たれし即時に、敵の方より名乗り出て、何の手間隙も要らず、いけ造作もなく敵を討ちしゆへ、どふも孝の道薄し、後にするも先へするも同じ道理ゆへ、これよりそれだけの苦勞苦患をせんと思ひ立ちけるぞ、どふか理屈らしき事どもなり。

Yōtarō thought it over carefully. ‘Since olden times, in books about vendetta, in order to avenge the death of his lord or parent, [an avenger] must sleep among fields and mountains, wreck his body, sell his daughter or wife into prostitution, endure his regrets, disguise himself, give no thought to poverty, encounter hardships and sadness, and finally kill his enemy--that is what makes it a loyal or filial act. But right after killing my father, my enemy announced himself to me, and without any time or effort needed, and without

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<sup>27</sup> *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1989), 181-182.

a bit of trouble, I killed him. As the Way of Filial Piety goes, this is pretty weak. Since it is the same whether I do it before or after the fact, I will set out now to endure those hardships and pains.' There was something rather strained about his decision.<sup>28</sup>

Thus begins Santō Kyōden's 1788 *kibyōshi*, *The After-the-Fact Vendetta* (*Katakiuchi ato no matsuri*), a brilliant parody of the many conventions of Edo period vendetta fiction. Yōtarō receives permission from his lord and sets out to seek revenge against the man he has already killed, in order that he may endure all the conventional hardships of a vendetta and thus achieve vengeance "by the book." Living up to such conventions proves hard work: at one point Yōtarō resorts to poisoning himself in order to fulfill the convention of falling ill on the road; in another instance he must pay a man to give him a beating.

Sadly, Kyōden does not provide the titles of any of the books Yōtarō relies upon for his understanding of proper vendetta; in the illustration we see them scattered about the floor for Yōtarō's perusal, but their title slips are tantalizingly blank.

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<sup>28</sup> Santō Kyōden, "Katakiuchi ato no matsuri," in Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., *Santō Kyōden zenshū*, vol 1 (Tokyo: Perikan sha, 1992), 369-370.

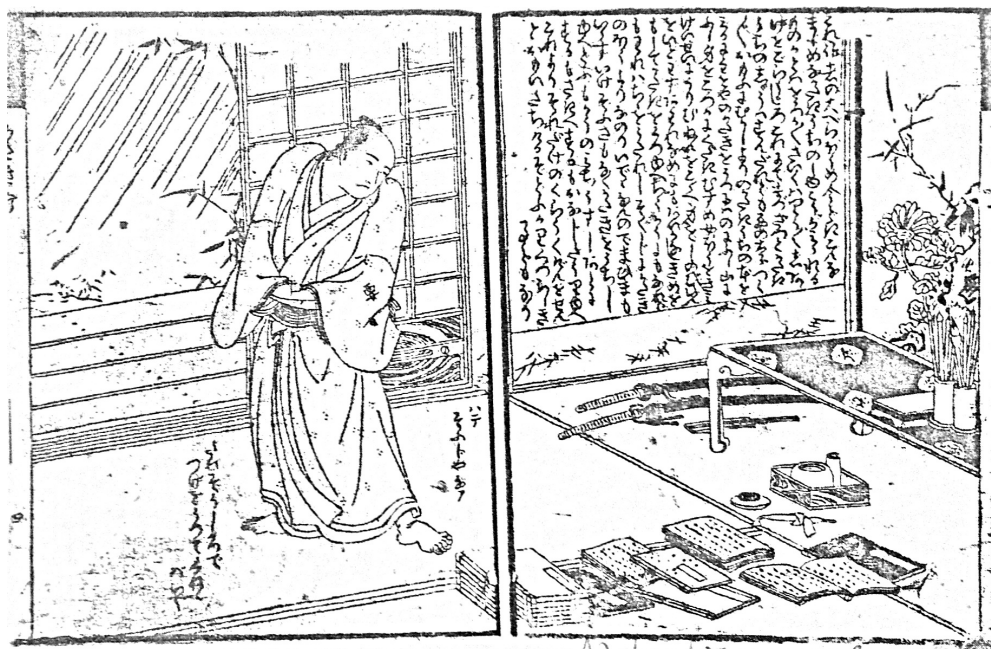


Fig. 1. Yōtarō reviews books of vendetta literature, *Katakiuchi ato no matsuri*, 1788.

Yet the point, of course, is not the details found in one specific work or another: what matters to the parodist Kyōden, and to his protagonist Yōtarō, is the idea of the whole, the existence of a tradition that reaches back to "olden times" and that defines the shape revenge must take in order to be real revenge. Close inspection of Yōtarō's list of necessary elements, however, reminds us that a tradition does not exist as a static given: reviewing the history of Japanese revenge literature, we will find the elements of "disguise" and "poverty" integrated into the literary representation of vendetta as early as the Kamakura period *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, for example, while the conceit of selling a wife or daughter into prostitution does not become established until the Edo period (by the middle of which it becomes mind-numbingly mandatory). Yōtarō's list of conventions thus points, inadvertently, to the dynamic quality of a tradition, reminding us that literary convention is more a process than a set of hard and fast rules. Indeed, the history of the representation of vendetta in the Japanese archipelago can best be thought of as an ongoing series of accretions, displacements, reinterpretations, and

disappearances--but ones that take place within larger contours that remain remarkably recognizable over the course of centuries. Revenge itself may consist, at its most fundamental level, of a simple arithmetic of injury and reaction, an exchange in which "B, injured by A, does to A what A did to him."<sup>29</sup> Yet revenge as a concept in any larger sense is very much a matter of time, place, and culture, constantly in motion, adopting and discarding meanings and significances; its imagination in literary representation changes, but each change builds on an established past.

By the time Kyōden published his parody in 1788, vendetta was a well-established feature of the popular literature landscape--and in terms of sheer numbers, the vast majority of extant works of Japanese revenge literature are indeed products of the Edo period, which was itself a highly unique moment for vendetta practice. These early modern works comprise the subject of the chapters that follow this one; in them I seek to understand Edo period revenge literature in terms of its contemporary moment. However, it is also important to understand that those works have a rich prehistory, that they participate in a literary process that reaches back--as Yōtarō aptly perceives--to "olden times," even as far back as the eighth century imperial mythohistories *Kojiki* (712) and *Nihon shoki* (720). In this chapter I therefore seek, in a sense, to follow Yōtarō's lead (though hopefully with more critical perspective than that foolhardy avenger). Examining the revenge literature of the ancient through the late medieval periods, a body of texts that encompasses anecdotes, war epics, tale literature, and *nō* plays, I seek to discern, amidst much flux and transformation, broader patterns in the literary imagination of revenge as it took shape over the course of centuries. We may consider these patterns the legacy bequeathed by

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<sup>29</sup> John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 6.

history to the authors and consumers of vendetta literature in the Edo period. They are among the fundamental materials out of which early modern authors would craft their own literary imagination of revenge, transforming it in innumerable ways in the process, and yet remaining part of a recognizable tradition.

Given the temporal scope of this chapter, the diverse range of materials under consideration, and the breathtaking richness and complexity of many of those works, I do not claim to exhaust the meanings embodied by this corpus of texts, nor can I claim to do justice to the singular particularities of individual works. Instead I search for patterns along three broad avenues of inquiry: I seek to understand the ways pre-Edo texts imagine the disruptive violence of revenge in relation to authority and the maintenance of order; I consider the ways the texts construct the fundamental figure of the avenger; and I examine the construction of the equally crucial figure of the enemy. Throughout the history of the representation of revenge in the archipelago, vendetta is consistently portrayed as an act carried out on behalf of another--usually a family member--and as therefore carrying a moral valence that justifies the act of murder as a virtuous act. Yet virtuous killing carried out by individuals, independent of authority structures, also consistently represents a problem in revenge discourse, constituting as it does a threat to public order and the institutions of authority. In works of the Edo period, a time when a bureaucratic approval procedure largely resolved the conflict between vengeance and order, this overtly problematic sense of vendetta's threat to authority quickly recedes. Yet as we shall see in the chapters to follow, at a quieter level the capacity of revenge literature to challenge existing orders and hierarchies remains a salient aspect of its dynamic throughout the Edo period.



To understand the prehistory of this aspect, I examine how the violent, disruptive potential of moral revenge is represented in pre-Edo works of revenge literature. Furthermore, what of the agents of vengeance themselves? Are avengers constructed as exemplars, or does their status as killers render their moral status more ambiguous? Are there elements that link their characterization across the centuries, contributing valences and resonances that we can understand as contributing to the figure of the avenger in the Edo period? Finally, how do these early texts approach the figure of the enemy--the initial instigator of the killing and the ultimate target of the vendetta? Are enemies constructed as pure villains, the way they would be by the late Edo period? Or is their status as enemy less straightforward? How does their representation help us to understand the idea of transgression in the premodern imagination of revenge?

I will argue that it is the ambiguous aspects of revenge--its complicated position between exemplarity and transgression, between disruption and order, and between obligation and emotion--that animates its representation in pre-Edo vendetta works; at the same time we shall see that the sense of vendetta's violence as overtly problematic diminishes over time. Pre-Edo avengers, I argue, are defined by their liminality and their connection to forces beyond the ordinary human order; as such, they are extraordinary embodiments of vendetta's position between virtue and disruption. Their unique status has an affecting power: avengers are consistently depicted as summoning a strong emotional response of admiration and sympathy, yet their tinge of the otherworldly appears to put them slightly beyond the scope of outright emulation. The enemies of these earlier revenge texts, meanwhile, are rarely clear-cut moral villains. Most often they are depicted primarily in terms of sheer threatening power, rather than as embodiments of transgression; in some instances they are, in fact, sympathetic characters,

with little to separate them in a moral sense from the avengers who seek to kill them. This legacy of the literary imagination of vendetta's protagonists, antagonists, and violence provides a crucial bedrock for understanding the particular manifestations of early modern revenge that I will examine in the chapters that follow. It provides a critical perspective for understanding Edo period revenge literature the way Yōtarō imagines it in Kyōden's parody--as something deeply informed by and participating in a much longer history.

### **Ideas of Order: the Conundrum of Virtuous Violence**

On the twenty-first day of the Eighth Month of Bunsei 3 (1820), the following document was submitted by domain authorities in Odawara to the Magistrate's Office (*machibugyōsho*) in Edo, officially requesting permission for two young retainers of the domain to embark upon a vendetta:

大久保加賀守家来

浅田只助養子 浅田鉄蔵 当辰廿一歳

同人実子 同 門次郎 当辰十二歳

右之者親浅田只助、其外之者ともへ、去々寅七月傍輩成滝万助致乱心、手疵為負、只助儀者深手にて翌日相果、万助儀者於其場所捕押一件吟味申付候処、全乱心に相違無之、猶吟味中入牢申付置候処、当春二月中牢拔致し候に付、尋申付候得共、今以行衛不相知候、然処牢拔致し候上者、本心に立戻候儀と相察し、領分は勿論、御府内併何国迄も万助行衛相尋、見掛次第親之敵討取申度段、右之者共願出候に付、承届、見懸次第討候上は、其所之役人え相断可申段申渡候、御帳え被附置候様致度、此段以使者申上候。

大久保加賀守使者

八月

志賀弥平次

Retainers of Ōkubo Kaga no kami:

Adopted son of Asada Tadasuke: Asada Tetsuzō, currently 21 years of age

Biological son of the same: Asada Monjirō, currently 12 years of age

Regarding the above, their father Asada Tadasuke and others were wounded in the Seventh Month of the year before last when their fellow samurai Narutaki Mansuke went mad. Tadasuke received a deep wound and died the following day. Mansuke was apprehended on site, and an investigation of the matter concluded that there was no question that he was completely mad. He was imprisoned during the course of the investigation, but in the Second Month of this year he escaped, and despite a search his whereabouts are unknown. Given that he was able to break out of his confinement it is believed that he has regained his sanity. The above two persons have made a request indicating their desire to search for Mansuke, not only in this domain, but within the shogunal capital and any other province, and upon locating him, to avenge the death of their father. They have been given to understand that upon finding and killing him, they must report at once to the local officials. We therefore request, via this messenger, that this matter be recorded in the official register.

Messenger of Ōkubo Kaga no kami

Shiga Yaheiji

Eighth Month<sup>30</sup>

This document is an artifact of the Tokugawa authorities' solution to what we may call the problem of revenge. The practice of vendetta had a long history in the Japanese archipelago, one undergirded by a moral ideology that constructed the act of avenging a slain family member as a virtuous act, specifically a profound demonstration of the virtue of filial piety--one of the fundamental virtues of the Confucian ideology that informed the early modern authorities' vision of society and of their own rule. The practice, moreover, had long been associated with members of the samurai class. This same class now comprised the ruling, administrative stratum of an authority structure that highly valued the peace and order obtained under Tokugawa suzerainty,

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<sup>30</sup> Reproduced in Hiraide Kōjirō, *Katakiuchi* (Tokyo: Bunshōkaku, 1909). Reprint in Chūkō bunko series (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1990), 37-38. Page references are to the 1990 edition. Such documents, composed for official purposes, apparently circulated beyond their intended audiences in multiple forms during the Edo period. According to Hiraide, this particular document also appears in various miscellanies, for example in *Hannichi kanwa* (dates uncertain), which was composed by the poet, author, and shogunal retainer Ōta Nanpo (1749-1823). Nanpo presumably obtained access to it in his capacity as a servant of the shogunate (from 1794 onwards he held a number of positions related to accounting and monetary affairs).

after many decades--indeed centuries--of warfare. Yet in its violence, the act of virtuous vengeance itself--murder clothed in the dress of moral exemplarity--constituted a threat to that public order and to the legal and administrative prerogatives of the authorities.

The exact process by which a solution to this contradiction was reached is not entirely clear, and no formal set of guidelines was ever officially issued, but by the mid-17th century a protocol for the pursuit of vengeance, one that permitted the moral practice while minimizing any risk to public order, and that kept the prerogatives of the authorities intact, had taken clear shape. Would-be avengers were expected to request advance permission from the shogunate, or from local domain authorities who would petition the shogunal authorities on their behalf. The letter above is an example of one such formal request issued by domain authorities on behalf of two local samurai. If formal permission was granted (which usually required confirmation that the avengers occupied a junior position in the family vis-a-vis the slain relative they sought to avenge, thereby adhering to the hierarchical structure of filial piety), the avengers' names would be officially registered with the shogunate. Should the vendetta prove successful, the avengers, following confirmation via a formal inquiry by local officials, would not be punished as murderers and disturbers of the peace, but recognized as the legitimate agents of virtuous violence.<sup>31</sup>

The establishment of this bureaucratic system for the regulation of revenge, with its accompanying documentation and paperwork, combined with the relative stability of the Edo

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<sup>31</sup> We begin to see laws permitting but regulating the practice of vendetta in the house laws of various *daimyō* of the 16th century, such as the Date family of northern Honshū and the Mōri of western Honshū. A 1597 promulgation by the Chōsokabe family of Tosa in Shikoku states, for example, "Regarding revenge, it is permissible for a child to avenge a parent, and for a younger brother to avenge an older brother. For an older brother to avenge a younger brother is, however, an inappropriate reversal. It is not necessary for a nephew to avenge his uncle." The Tokugawa regulations appear to build upon such existing domain laws. See Hiraide, *Katakiuchi*, 1909 [1990], 31-32. The quotation is from 32.

period, which facilitated the survival of a fair number of these documents as well as notes on the practice recorded in diaries and journals, enables us to obtain a far more reliable understanding of early modern vendetta practice than of any version of the practice that came before. Vendetta had clearly been a feature of life in the Japanese islands for centuries, yet the texts in which we find it represented prior to the Edo period are not the documents of officialdom, but primarily highly imaginative, literary texts--anecdotes, war epics, plays, tales. These texts can do little to provide us with dependable information about the historical practice of vendetta in the years preceding the founding of the Tokugawa shogunate; they can, however, give us insight into the imagination and discourse of revenge over the course of many centuries. A close reading of these texts reveals that the "problem of revenge"--the tension between the disruptive violence of virtuous vendetta, and the maintenance of public order and respect for authority, which the Tokugawa registration system attempted to resolve--comprises a strong current flowing throughout them. It also reveals that certain elements of revenge discourse remained touchstones across the centuries, lending the imagination of the practice a consistent general shape into the Edo period.

If we return to the case of the Asada brothers, the would-be avengers in the document above, we can see some of these consistent elements at work. The application to the shogunal authorities for permission to seek revenge was successful; following the positive reply from the Magistrate's Office, the Odawara officials issued a formal letter of permission to each of the brothers. The letter to the younger brother, Monjirō, begins:

今般親之敵討相願候に付、昨夕於頭宅申聞候通、父之仇には俱に天を不戴之理にて、左も可有之儀と尤至極之心底、入御聴候処、奇特之御沙汰も有之、公儀於御奉行所も、畢竟御旧家之御家来者、格別之儀と御沙汰も宜候。

Regarding your current request to avenge the death of your father: as you were informed last night at the main residence, according to the principle that one should not share the same sky with one's father's killer, your request is appropriate and your desire is most justified. When his lordship heard of it, he expressed his praise for you, and the shogunal Magistrate's Office also spoke favorably, noting the exceptional quality [befitting] the retainers of a longstanding house.<sup>32</sup>

The accompanying letter to Monjirō's older brother Tetsuzō specifies the guidelines the brothers should adhere to in their search for Mansuke: should they succeed in killing Mansuke, they must inform the local officials immediately; they must avoid carrying out any act of violence in certain sensitive sites, such as the vicinity of Edo Castle or the shogunal family temples in Edo; and if they learn that their enemy has died of illness before they succeed in finding him, they must secure proof to present to the authorities. The letter also states that an allowance will be provided to the brother's family while the two young men are on the road.

We not only witness in these letters of the bureaucratic procedures and restraints that sought to limit the disruptive potential of vengeful violence--the avoidance of certain sites, the necessity of reporting at once to the local authorities upon completion of the act--but we also catch a glimpse of the ideological status of the act itself, through the expressions of admiration voiced by the authorities with regard to the brothers' desire. Specifically, they praise the brothers' aspiration in terms of filial piety, which the letter to Monjirō expresses using a version of the four-character expression 不俱戴天: literally "not share the same sky."

This expression is a shorthand allusion to the passages concerning revenge in the ancient Confucian Chinese *Record of Rites* (Ch. Liji, J. Raiki), a work dedicated to matters of proper ritual and etiquette (or in a broader sense, proper behavior) and edited into its most enduring

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<sup>32</sup> Reproduced in Hiraide, 39.

form during the first century CE.<sup>33</sup> The original passages on revenge contained in the *Record of Rites* are as follows. The first comes from the *Quli* (J. *Kyokurai*) section:

With the enemy who has slain his father, one should not live under the same heaven. With the enemy who has slain his brother, one should never have his sword to seek (to deal vengeance). With the enemy who has slain his intimate friend, one should not live in the same state (without seeking to slay him).<sup>34</sup>

And the second from the *Danqiu* (J. *Tankyū*) section:

Zi Xia asked Confucius, saying, ‘How should (a son) conduct himself with reference to the man who has killed his father or mother?’ The Master said, ‘He should sleep on straw, with his shield for a pillow; he should not take office; he must be determined not to live with the slayer under the same heaven. If he meet him in the market-place or court, he should not have to go back for his weapon, but (instantly) fight with him.

‘Allow me to ask (said the other), ‘how one should do with reference to the man who has slain his brother?’ ‘He may take office,’ was the reply, ‘but not in the same state with the slayer; if he be sent on a mission by his ruler’s orders, though he may then meet with the man, he should not fight with him.’

‘And how should one do,’ continued Zi Xia, ‘in the case of a man who has slain one of his paternal cousins?’ Confucius said, ‘He should not take the lead (in the avenging). If he whom it chiefly concerns is able to do that, he should support him from behind, with his weapon in his hand.’<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Alternately translated as the *Book of Rites* or the *Record of Ritual*, for example in Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000). Compiled during the Former Han Dynasty (202-8 CE) and edited into its most enduring form during the first century CE, the *Record of Rites* assembles explanations from the late Zhou through the Qin and early Han Dynasties that outline proper conduct, etiquette, and ritual, covering a wide ground that includes matters of ceremony, dress, and governance. While Japanese revenge ideology drew on this work as early as the eighth century, the history of vendetta discourse and practice ultimately took a distinctly different shape in the archipelago from that on the continent. For a thorough discussion of the history of vendetta in China, with a particular focus on legal discourse and practice, see Michael Dalby, “Revenge and the Law in Traditional China,” in *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Oct., 1981), 267-307.

<sup>34</sup> Reproduced, with minor amendments, from James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism*, vol. 3 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968; reprint of edition by Oxford University Press, 1885), 92. Original in Takeuchi Teruo, ed. *Shinshaku kanbun taikēi*, vol. 27 (Tokyo: Meijishoin, 1971), 46-47. I first encountered these passages, and their connection to the Nihon shoki episode discussed below, in Mills, “Kataki-Uchi: The Practice of Blood-Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan,” *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 4 (1976), 529-530.

<sup>35</sup> Reproduced, with minor amendments, from Legge, *ibid.*, 140. Original in Takeuchi, *ibid.*, 104-105.

These passages not only define the grounding for vendetta as a morally sound act of filial piety; they also contribute to the shape proper vendetta practice would take in the Edo period, specifying the hierarchical relationships appropriate to virtuous revenge--sons avenging fathers and younger brothers avenging older brothers, but not the other way around. The history of the involvement of these passages in the imagination of moral revenge in the archipelago is long. Above, we saw them referenced in the Odawara officials' letter of 1820, a document involved in the formal regulation of vendetta's disruptive potential. Strikingly, we can also find them referenced, nearly word-for-word, in a text that predates that letter by exactly eleven hundred years: the *Nihon shoki* (720), which together with the *Kojiki* (712) is the oldest extant work of written imperial history. The passage is an eloquent summary of the emotional motivations of revenge, the moral grounds that justify it, and ultimately the unease that surrounds its disruptive potential:

秋八月己未朔、天皇謂皇太子億計曰、吾父先王無罪、而大泊瀨天皇射殺棄骨郊野、至今未獲。憤歎盈懷。臥泣、行号、志雪讎恥。吾聞、父之讎不與共戴天。兄弟之讎不反兵。交遊之讎不同國。夫匹夫之子、居父母之讎、寢苦枕干、不與共國、遇諸市朝、不反兵而便鬪。況吾立為天子、二年于今矣。願壞其陵、摧骨投散。今以此報、不亦孝呼。

Autumn, Eighth month, First day. The heavenly sovereign addressed the Crown Prince Oke: 'Our father the former prince, though innocent of any crime, was shot and killed by the heavenly sovereign Ōhatsuse, and his remains discarded on the fields beyond the city. I still have not retrieved them. My breast is filled with anger and grief. I lie down and sob, I cry as I go about, and I long to clear the shame [done us by] this enemy. I have heard that 'One should not share the same heaven with the killer of one's father. One should always have one's weapon ready to slay the killer of one's brother. One should not reside in the same country with the killer of one's associate.' Even the child of a lowly commoner, if the killer of his parents is alive, sleeps on rush matting, uses his shield as a pillow, and refuses to share the same country with his enemy. If he meets him in the marketplace, he is ready with his weapon and fights at once. How much more so I, who already rose to the position of Son of Heaven two years ago! I long to destroy his tomb,



crush his remains and scatter them about. If I avenge [our father] in this way, will it not truly be filial?<sup>36</sup>

The speaker in this passage, from an entry in Book 15 of the *Nihon shoki*, is Emperor Kenzō. He addresses his elder brother, the future Emperor Ninken, expressing his desire to avenge their father, who was murdered during a hunt by the late Emperor Yūryaku.<sup>37</sup> The passage is brief, but dramatic: we see a powerful man, the ruler of the realm, consumed with rage and emotion over the grief and shame of his father's murder, and yet uncertain how to act--or whether he is permitted to act at all. So powerful is his rancor that he longs to find a way to take revenge against a man who is already dead, and he seeks to find a legitimate channel through which this violent desire can be expressed. His solution is to turn to the discourse of moral obligation found in the *Record of Rites*; but he significantly poses the moral justification for his desire to take revenge as a question, not a confident declaration.

Part of the uncertainty that surrounds the act of vendetta throughout much of its discursive history may lie precisely in the tension between the two poles of emotion and obligation Kenzō seeks to unite in this passage. He speaks of his motivation to take revenge in terms of affect ("My breast is filled with anger and grief. I lie down and sob, I cry as I go about..."), but he seeks to justify it through recourse to the proper duties of a filial son. There is, of course, a strong affective element inherent in the Confucian conception of filial piety (Ch. *xiao*, J. *kō*), but it is striking that Kenzō's discourse invokes the term in a way that seeks to create positive action out of negative emotions, casting his violent desire for revenge as a social virtue,

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<sup>36</sup> Kojima Noriyuki et al, eds., *Nihon shoki* 2, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 3 (Shōgakukan, 1996), 248-249. References to this text below will be marked as SNKBZ 3.

<sup>37</sup> These rulers are traditionally dated to the 5th century. According to Book 14 of the *Nihon shoki*, Yūryaku was resentful that the late Emperor Ankō had favored the brothers' father Prince Ichinohe no Oshiwa for the succession. Inviting the prince to a hunt, Yūryaku made a show of mistaking him for a boar and shot him dead. See SNKBZ 3, 146-147.

indeed as a duty.<sup>38</sup> The recourse to notions of obligation and action, however, introduces the possibility of broader social consequences that extend beyond the grieving breast of the bereaved emperor. Kenzō's brother, Prince Oke, reminds him of the potential dangers of indulging in revenge, morally justified or not.

Lamenting and at first unable to speak, Prince Oke gives two reasons *not* to give in to the desire to take revenge on Yūryaku by desecrating his tomb. The first reason is that Yūryaku was an emperor, the rightful and recognized ruler of the land, whereas the father they seek to avenge never rose above the status of prince:

以此觀之、尊卑惟別。而忍壞陵墓、誰人主以奉天之靈。

Considering it this way, this is the difference between noble and low. If you secretly destroy his tomb, who will serve the imperial spirit, recognizing it as lord?<sup>39</sup>

There are, in other words, virtues and proprieties to consider that may temper any facile recourse to the moral status of the relationship between parent and child; filial piety should not be pursued at the cost of proper respect for social hierarchies ("noble and low"), and particularly for the unique social position of the emperor. Prince Oke also points out that it was through the good will of Yūryaku's son that Kenzō was able to ascend the throne at all; to desecrate the tomb of his benefactor's father would be an act of gross impropriety, and an act unbefitting a ruler.

毀陵、翻見於華裔、億計恐其不可以莅国子民也。

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<sup>38</sup> These two (related but distinct) poles of personal emotion and obligation would continue to play crucial roles in the discourse of vendetta through the end of the Edo period. Indeed, when the Meiji government officially banned the practice of vendetta in 1873, the decree explicitly acknowledged both poles: "Since ancient times it has been customarily regarded as the *duty* of a son or younger brother to avenge the murder of his father or elder brother. While this is a *natural expression of the deepest human feelings*, it is ultimately a serious breach of the law on account of private enmity..."Italics mine. Translation from D.E. Mills, "Katakiuchi: The Practice of Blood-Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 4 (1976): 525. Original in *Koji ruien*, vol. 46 (Tokyo: Koji ruien kankōkai, 1932), 502.

<sup>39</sup> SNKBZ 3, 248-249.

If you destroy the tomb and display this act to the entire realm, I fear that you will be unable to administer the realm and care for the people.<sup>40</sup>

In other words, revenge for a parent's death may be recognized as a moral duty, but it also constitutes a serious threat to public order. Oke effectively urges Kenzō to weigh his status as a grieving, filial individual against his stature and responsibilities as ruler; revenge may be morally justified, he concedes, but not when it destabilizes the larger social order, which is precisely what would result from one emperor's act of violence against the remains of another--on behalf of a man who was not an emperor at all. Oke's words remind the emperor that revenge is rarely as simple as the act one individual takes against another; it involves a broader, more complicated web of social relationships. Even if Kenzō could justify an act of revenge against Yūryaku, he would be neglecting his debts to Yūryaku's son, his own benefactor. As a result of Oke's remonstrance, Kenzō abandons his plan for revenge.<sup>41</sup> Contained within this brief narrative of aborted revenge, we find a complicated politics between emotion, obligation, and order or authority; the tension between these elements remains an animating valence of revenge literature throughout the centuries.

In fact, the particular tension we see in the story of Kenzō and Oke between personal revenge and public order was more than a matter of compelling narrative; the moral sanction of

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 250-251.

<sup>41</sup> An alternative version of this exchange between Kenzō and Oke appears in the *Kojiki* (712). In the *Kojiki* version, Oke, rather than remonstrating with the emperor, offers to go himself to destroy the tomb. When he reaches the tomb, however, he only digs a small hole at its side. Questioned by Kenzō about his act, Oke explains that destroying the entire tomb would be inappropriate, for Yūryaku was both their relative and an emperor who had governed the entire realm. Oke recognizes, however, that avenging their father is also a real moral duty. Digging the hole at the side of Yūryaku's tomb, he explains, suffices to attain symbolic revenge and uphold their duty as filial sons, without disrupting the social order and neglecting their other, equally valid responsibilities. We can see this alternate telling of the same episode as different not only in the way its actions transpire, but also in the different way these highly charged elements of the vendetta narrative economy--emotion, obligation, and power--are valued. See Yamaguchi Yoshinori and Kōnoshi Takamitsu, eds., *Kojiki*, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 1 (Shōgakusan, 1997), 366-369.

personal murder represented a challenge to any authority that sought to maintain control over the social order. We find this tension specifically articulated beyond the realm of narrative as early as the Nara period, in a civil service exam question and answer dated Tenpyō 3 (731), included in the *kanshibun* anthology *Keikokushū* (compiled 827):

問。明主立法。殺人者處死。先王制禮。父讎不同天。因禮復讎。既違國憲。守法忍怨。爰失子道。失子道者不孝。違國憲者不臣。惟法惟禮。何用何捨。臣子之道。兩濟得無。

Question: According to the laws established by a wise ruler, one who kills another is punished with death. According to the rites decided by the ancient kings, one should not share the same heaven with his father's killer. According to the rites, one should take revenge; this clearly violates the law of the land. If one adheres to the law and restrains his rancor, then he has lost the proper way of a son. One who loses the way of a son is unfilial. One who violates the law of the land is not a good subject. Law and rites: which should be employed, and which rejected? The way of a subject and the way of a son: [there seems] no way to decide among the two.<sup>42</sup>

The examinee begins his answer by stating, “I have heard it said that filiality cannot not be rejected...The flourishing of the country and the elevation of the family both depend upon the way of filial piety.” He concludes by arguing that “one who is filial in his home will surely be loyal to the state.”<sup>43</sup> The answer, in other words, takes the two seemingly contradictory moral demands and demonstrates that one actually promotes and ensures the other. However, the tension between political authority and personal revenge remains contentious at least until the

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<sup>42</sup> The *Keikokushū* was compiled on the order of Emperor Junna by Yoshimine no Yasuyo (785-830), Shigeno no Sadanushi (785-852), and Sugawara no Kiyotada (770-842). Modeled after the *Wenxuan* (J. *Monzen*), it included works of poetry and prose in kanbun by 178 authors from the Nara period through the early Heian period. The passage in question is found in the Kokumin toshi kabushiki gaisha, ed., *Kōchū Nihon bungaku taikai*, vol. 24 (Tokyo: Kokumin tosho, 1927), 388. A *kakikudashi* of most of what is cited here, together with discussion of the passage, speculating on the influence of the *Classic of Filial Piety* (Ch. *Xiaojing*, J. *Kōkyō*) on the examinee's answer, can be found in Yamagishi Tokuhei, “Katakiuchi bungaku to shite no Soga monogatari,” *Nihon bungaku renkō: chūsei* (Chūkōkan, 1927), 215-216. See also D. E. Mills, “Katakiuchi,” 533-534.

<sup>43</sup> *Keikokushū*, 388-390.

establishment of the Edo period system that attempts to accommodate both within a regulatory framework.

### Exemplary Disruptions

Indeed, a tension appears to run through the depiction of vendetta in literature for centuries after the composition of the *Nihon shoki*, between celebrating virtuous revenge on the one hand, and maintaining about it a sense of violation meriting punishment on the other. After the *Nihon shoki*, the next oldest extant vendetta narrative is found in the *Collection of Tales of Times Now Past* (*Konjaku monogatari shū*, compiled late-11th to early-12th centuries), the only extant vendetta narrative to come to us from the Heian period. It tells of an unnamed, low-ranking samurai in the service of a provincial governor, who succeeds in killing the man who killed his father years before, a seasoned and well-protected warrior named Tarōsuke. The story concludes with the reappearance of the avenger, who has spent three days in hiding after carrying out his revenge:

其後、彼太郎介殺シタル男三日計り有テ、服ヲ黒クシテ出来タリ。守ノ前ニ忍テ慎[慎]ム出来タリケレバ、守ヨリ始メテ是ト見ル同僚皆泣ケリ。其後、此ノ男、人に心ヲ被置、ウルサキ者ニ被思レテゾ有ケル程ニ、幾モ無クテ病付テ死ニケレバ、守モ極ク哀ニナム思ケル。然レバ、祖ノ敵キ罰事ハ、極キ兵也ト云ヘドモ、有難キ事也。其レニ、此男ノ啼ク只一人シテ、然計ノ眷属隙無ク守ル者ヲ、心ノ如ク罰チ得ルハ、実ニ天道ノ許シ給フ事ナメリ、トゾ人讃ケルトナム語り伝ヘタルトヤ。

Then, after three days had passed, the man who had killed Tarōsuke reappeared, clad in black. When he made his appearance meekly and quietly before the governor, everyone who saw him, from the governor down to his fellow servants, shed tears. After that he was held in high regard by others and thought of as a magnificent person, but before long he fell ill and died. The governor, too, found this deeply moving.

So, to cut down the killer of one's forefather is said to be the act of a real warrior, but it is a truly rare and impressive act. What's more, this man was so bold as to act alone, and was nonetheless able to strike down a man so heavily guarded by his retainers, just as his heart desired. Truly this is a sign that Heaven appeared to pardon his act: so the people said in praise of him. So the story has been told and so it has been passed down.<sup>44</sup>

There is a peculiar tension in this conclusion to the story. The avenger is clearly depicted as being held in tremendously high esteem by the members of the governor's household--his act so moving and powerful that it brings even the governor to tears--and the bystanders within the story affirm that Heaven (*tendō*) pardons his act of violence. Yet this invocation of Heaven's pardon--which actually occurs three times in the brief narrative--underscores the fact that the avenger's act is, at some level, problematic. There is a socially disruptive quality to the young man's act of revenge. The avenger is literally a nobody (strikingly, the story never informs us of his name), while the man he kills is the chief retainer of a high-ranking noble who is in fact the son of the avenger's own master. It is a point of contention within the story whether or not the nameless avenger merits punishment for his act of revenge, and while he is ultimately protected from punishment, on moral grounds, by his own master the governor, he nonetheless dies soon after, as quoted above. In other words, praiseworthy though the avenger's act may be, it does not guarantee him a happy ending: the inclusion of the detail about his untimely death suggests that at some level his act of revenge is not completely pardonable. Or perhaps the extraordinary nature of his feat sets him apart from the run of ordinary human beings and makes him not long

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<sup>44</sup> “Taira no Koremochi ga rōdō, korosaruru koto,” in Komine Kazuaki ed., *Konjaku monogatari shū* 4, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 36 (Iwanami shoten: 1994), 498-502. The quotation is found on 502.

for this world; as I will argue further below, there is in fact an element of otherworldliness to pre-Edo literary avengers.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, reading vendetta fiction of the Edo period, in which it becomes conventional to conclude in a manner almost precisely matching Henry James' definition of a "happy ending"--"a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks"--it is possible to forget that the greatest work of medieval revenge literature, *The Tale of the Soga Brothers*, which had an ongoing, rich cultural legacy throughout the Edo period, is in many ways a tragedy.<sup>46</sup> Like the nameless avenger in *Tales from Times Now Past*, the avenging Soga brothers succeed in killing their enemy, earning acclaim and moving many to tears in the process; but also like the *Konjaku* avenger, they are not permitted to live in the aftermath.

In fact, the disruptive--or even subversive--aspect of vendetta, suggested in the narratives examined above, is rendered explicit in the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, a lengthy and highly complex narrative that depicts the revenge of the brothers Soga Jūrō Sukenari (1172-1193) and Soga Gorō Tokimune (1174-1193) against their enemy (and cousin) Kudō Suketsune (?-1193), who orchestrates the murder of their father as part of a land dispute when they are young

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<sup>45</sup> My attention to the detail of the avenger's untimely death, and its potential significance, is indebted to Saeki Shin'ichi's commentary on this story. He uses the anecdote's conclusion, with its depiction of respect for the avenger's act, and the twist of the avenger's early death, as illustration for a broader argument about the status of vendetta prior to the Edo period: "Vendetta may have been approved of as a practice, but that does not mean it was common, and in one sense it contains an aspect that is incompatible with social order." See Saeki Shin'ichi, "Fukushū no ronri: *Soga monogatari* to katakiuchi," *Kyōto gobun* 11 (2004), 19.

<sup>46</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," in Vincent B. Leitch et al, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 858. I discuss the conventional happy endings of late Edo vendetta fiction in Chapter Four.

children.<sup>47</sup> The *Tale*, the earliest version of which dates to the late Kamakura period, is set primarily during the first years of the Kamakura shogunate, a new political order founded by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199, himself a prominent character in the *Tale*). Yoritomo seeks to establish order after decades of warfare and turmoil, in part by channeling conflicts through bureaucratic institutions and his own personal authority. Under this new order, vendetta is explicitly a forbidden act. The Soga brothers Jūrō and Gorō, who largely come of age together with the new order, are the grandsons of one of Yoritomo's old enemies; moreover, the enemy against whom they seek revenge is one of Yoritomo's most prized and trusted retainers.<sup>48</sup> The brothers are thus explicitly constructed as non-entities under Yoritomo's new order: deprived of their lands, forbidden from holding official position, hampered from pursuing personal justice through formal channels. They are, in a sense, representatives of all who have been neutralized or disenfranchised by Yoritomo's new political regime, and their revenge--surreptitiously

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<sup>47</sup> *The Tale of the Soga Brothers* is based in historical fact; the two historical brothers, Soga no Jūrō Sukenari (1172-1193) and Soga no Gorō Tokimune (1174-1193) are said to have cut down their enemy--their own cousin, Kudō no Suketsune (?-1193)--on the twenty-eighth day of the Fifth Month in 1193. The oldest extant version of the incident comes down to us from the Kamakura period history *Mirror of the East* (*Azuma kagami*, compiled late thirteenth-early fourteenth century). Yet this account, with its uncharacteristically atmospheric evocation of the dark, stormy night of the attack, appears already to display the traces of oral storytelling art, and indeed the incident is thought to have become the subject of oral narrative soon after its occurrence. Not only did the incident continue to inspire retellings and reinventions in a variety of genres through the Edo period, but the prose narrative of the *Tale* itself exists in multiple variants. The version I examine here is the oldest written version, known as the *Manabon Soga monogatari* (so-called because it is written in an idiosyncratic version of Sino-Japanese--later variants were written using the *kana* syllabary). Although the date of the *Manabon*'s initial inscription is unclear, it is considered to bear the influence of the oral versions of the story that are thought to have begun circulating soon after the revenge itself, and it is the only extant version of the *Tale* considered a product of the Kamakura period. I have relied upon the *kakikudashi* version of the *Manabon* published in two volumes by Tōyō bunko: Aoki Akira, Ikeda Keiko, and Kitagawa Tadahiko, eds., *Manabon Soga monogatari*, vol. 1 Tōyō bunko 468 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1987) and Sasakawa Sachio et al, eds., *Manabon Soga monogatari*, vol. 2 Tōyō bunko 486 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1988). When I insert Japanese-language quotations, I do so from this *kakikudashi* version, which is faithful to the extensive *kunten* of the original (themselves beyond the capacities of my word processor). For the text of the *Manabon* in its original layout, see Kadokawa Gen'yoshi, ed., *Myōhonjibon Soga monogatari* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1969), upon which the Tōyō bunko *kakikudashi* is based.

<sup>48</sup> The point that the brothers grow up and come of age in a way that mirrors the coming-of-age of the Kamakura shogunate itself is made by Gomi Fumihiko in his *Azuma kagami no hōhō: jijitsu to shinwa ni miru chūsei*, expanded edition (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2000), 46.



supported and sympathized with by a wide network of relatives--represents a collective expression of dissent against the new order by those who are its victims.

*Key characters in The Tale of the Soga Brothers:*

*Avengers:* Soga no **Jūrō** Sukenari (Ichiman)  
Soga no **Gorō** Tokimune (Hakoō)

*Enemy:* Kudō no **Suketsune** (prized retainer of shogun Minamoto no **Yoritomo**)

The subversive status of vendetta under this new order is made explicit in a scene in which the brothers attempt to enlist the aid of their maternal half-brother Kyō no Kojirō in their secret plot against their enemy. He turns them down and admonishes them with the following words:

いやいや、聞くとも聞き候はじ。当鎌倉殿の御代になりて、正しき親の敵、日の敵なれども忽に宿意を遂ぐる者はなし。上へ申して訴詔をこそ致し候へ。時代に随ふ事なれば、膝を組み肩を並べ酒盃を差し通はせども、恥とも云はず、誇る人もなきものなり。当時さやうの悪事する者は豪の者とは云はず、返て嗚呼の者とこそ申し合ひ候へ。

‘No, no, I won’t even hear of it. In this age of the Lord of Kamakura [Yoritomo] no one takes revenge directly, whether against the proper enemy of his father or against an enemy of the moment. Address the authorities and file a suit. In these times, it is possible to sit knee-by-knee or stand shoulder-to-shoulder [with one’s enemy] and even to exchange cups of wine without shame, and no one will speak ill of you. In the current age, anyone who pursues such an evil act [as vendetta], far from being considered impressive, is instead spoken of as a fool.’<sup>49</sup>

Vendetta is no longer pursued precisely because it runs counter to the peaceable submission Yoritomo's regime attempts to enforce among warriors who have been engaged in a series of violent conflicts for decades. Kyō no Kojirō's words allude to vendetta as an inherent part of this

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<sup>49</sup> *Manabon*, vol. 1, 261-262.

recent, tumultuous past. Indeed, the potential for conflict among a world of eastern warriors--warriors depicted as coveting land, valuing name, and abhorring shame--ripples throughout the *Tale*, illustrated most dramatically in the two massive hunts that bookend the narrative, where the killing of game becomes a vehicle into which warriors channel their fierce competitiveness with one another and make names for themselves, and where even simple amusements risk boiling over into bloodshed among warriors who refuse to be shamed before one another. Kyō no Kojirō's words link vendetta to this volatile culture of shame and name and strong-willed warriors, a culture that in fact has been only partially subdued and that poses an ongoing threat to the regime of peace Yoritomo has imposed. The brothers' insistence on pursuing vendetta--against the spirit of the times and the prohibition of the shogun--is thus a highly subversive act, and a doomed one. The brothers are aware that their vendetta is an embrace of death; they know that even if they succeed in killing their enemy they will not gain lands, office, or a reversal of their status as political nobodies, but will instead pay for the success with their lives. Indeed, the chapters of the *Tale* leading up to the vendetta itself comprise one extended and tragic leave-taking, as the brothers bid farewell to the closest people in their lives--servants, teacher, lover, mother--knowing that whether their revenge succeeds or fails, they will never see any of them again.

The brothers do succeed in killing their enemy, on a rainy night in the encampment at the foot of Mt. Fuji where Yoritomo has arranged a massive hunt among the warriors of the eastern provinces. If the subversive potential of the brothers' vendetta is not clear enough in the act of killing one of the shogun's most trusted retainers in the shogun's own encampment, it quickly becomes explicit: the older brother Jūrō is killed in the melee that follows, but Gorō fights his

way into the lodging of Yoritomo himself, with the intent to murder the shogun. He is, however, captured before he can draw his sword against Yoritomo. The scene that follows the next morning, in which Yoritomo interrogates Gorō before his execution, is remarkable for the deft way it interweaves the twin strands of exemplarity and disruptiveness that pull at one another in the imagination of vendetta.

The interrogation scene in some ways resembles the conclusion to the story from *Tales from Times Now Past*: the avenger Gorō faces an audience that is profoundly moved, even to tears, by his act of revenge. The lords and retainers assembled for the interrogation are deeply impressed by Gorō's fearless answers and by his account of the long, difficult years the brothers spent longing and planning to avenge their slain father. The irony is that the interrogator Yoritomo is no less moved than the others in attendance--despite the fact that he was himself a target of the attack, and that he stands as the embodiment of the new social and political order under which vendetta is a forbidden act. As Gorō speaks of his mother, with whom the pursuit of revenge produced a long estrangement and now a final parting, all in attendance--including Yoritomo--find themselves brought to tears by his heartfelt narrative. Yoritomo is so deeply affected that he expresses a desire to pardon Gorō, but he is forced to acknowledge the threat such a pardon would pose to order, and to his own authority. The complex politics of emotion, order, and authority emerge in a dense tangle in the exchange between Gorō and the shogun:

「死罪を宥めて召し仕ふべけれども、傍輩これを聞て、『敵を討つ者をば御興あり』とて自今以後も狼藉絶ゆべからず。されば向後のために汝をば宥めぬなり。更に恨むる事なかれ」... と仰せられければ、五郎これを承て、「仰せにも及び候はず。今は足手を切り首を召され候ふとても全く恨み進すべからず候ふなり。中々且も宥められ候はむ事こそ深き恨と存じ候ふべけれ。その故は、舎兄の十郎

助成と朝夕、一所にて屍を曝さむと契り候ひしに、片時なれども前後の別こそ本意にあらず存じ候へ。」

‘I should spare you the death penalty, but upon hearing of it my retainers would say, ‘[Lord Yoritomo] is pleased with those who take vengeance upon their enemies,’ and from this time on there would be no end of disorder. Therefore, for the sake of the future I cannot spare you. Do not harbor resentment against me.’...Gorō replied, ‘It goes without saying! Even if you now cut off my feet and hands and take my head, I should harbor no resentment against you. Rather, if you were to show me even a moment’s leniency, my resentment would be deep. The reason is that, morning and night, my brother Jūrō and I swore to one another that our corpses would lie exposed together in one place. To be parted from him by death even for a short time runs against my true will.’<sup>50</sup>

Who is in whose power here, and why? Yoritomo has the power of life and death over Gorō, but he cannot act as his own heart wishes; deeply moved at a personal level by the affective power of the brothers' vendetta, he must nonetheless reassert his authority over the disruptive potential of vendetta as a practice by sentencing Gorō to execution. Gorō, meanwhile, embodies that disruptive power in the very words of his own reply. Discounting the shogun's explanations about order and authority, Gorō instead affirms Yoritomo's decision to execute him, but on his own, personal terms--rooted not in respect to the shogun or to public order, but in his personal allegiance to his slain brother and fellow avenger. Reinterpreting Yoritomo's words as he replies to them, Gorō publicly undercuts the shogun's authority and reasserts his personal ownership of his own fate. For a moment it appears as though the avenger, even as he stands condemned, is imbued with such power by his act of vengeance that he can dictate terms to the most powerful man in the land.

Takagi Makoto sees the earliest version of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, which I have quoted here, as being structured by a narrative economy in which the language of the narrator--

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<sup>50</sup> *Manabon*, vol. 2, 214.

and the voice of Yoritomo himself--express an ideological “outer layer” representative of the dominant political system, one that is repeatedly relativized by the language employed by the Soga brothers, who represent a treasonous force opposed to this system. The voice of the “outer layer” therefore attempts to redirect or co-opt the dangerous, concealed meanings implicit in the brothers’ language, always interpreting the brothers’ actions as matters of private conflict rather than acknowledging them as direct challenges to the system’s claims to authority. This voice thus attempts to keep the subversive potential of vendetta under some degree of restraint.<sup>51</sup> We witness this phenomenon in the passage above, and elsewhere in the same scene, as Yoritomo praises the brothers’ vendetta as an expression of filial devotion to their father, but sidesteps the treasonous implications of Gorō’s attempt to kill *him* as well, and condemns vendetta in general as a dangerous and disruptive practice. This tension, embodied in the very language of the *Tale* itself, mirrors (at a vastly more elaborate level) the conclusion of the *Konjaku* anecdote, in which the avenger is both praised and mysteriously struck dead. It suggests a double valence to the imagination of vendetta in these works, a pull in two directions at once: towards admiration for the exemplary power of vendetta on the one hand, and towards an impulse to check its disruptive potential on the other. That vendetta is conceived of as extraordinary and deeply affecting in these texts is clear, but a sense of unease attends that extraordinariness, an unease perhaps connected to the dangers that attend the combination of exemplarity and violence. The moral violence of revenge is presented as worthy of admiration, but not necessarily emulation; its rarity is part of what gives it such extraordinary, affective power--and keeps the social order from descending into violent chaos fueled by personal enmity.

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<sup>51</sup> See Takagi Makoto, “Hangyaku no gengo / seido no gengo: Manabon *Soga monogatari* no hyōgen to kōzō,” *Nagoya daigaku Kokugo kokubungaku* 64 (July 1989), 1-17. His argument is summarized succinctly on 1-2.

## Old Violence, New Orders

It is striking, therefore, that as we move forward into the far more tumultuous years of the late medieval period, the anxiety over the disruptive potential of vendetta largely evaporates. If anything, we see a reversal in works of vendetta literature: the extraordinariness of vendetta, the power that attends it as an exemplary act, makes it a force for order in a world already turned upside down. The power of vendetta becomes more celebratory and auspicious. Tears recede. Happy endings begin to appear. The *Tale of the Soga Brothers* concludes with the brutal beheading of Gorō with a blunt sword, the haunting of the site of the brothers' death, and a series of tonsures by the loved ones of the brothers, moved by grief to renounce the gloomy and violent world in which the *Tale* is set. Contrast the end of the late medieval *nō* play *Mochizuki*, in which the wife, son, and servant of a man slain by his own cousin succeed in taking revenge against the cousin Mochizuki at a roadside inn. The three avengers strike down their enemy while in disguise as performers of the auspicious lion dance (*shishimai*): the crescendo building to the act of killing takes the form of a felicitous dance, with the chorus' cries of "strike! strike!" (*uteya uteya*) referring simultaneously to the drum and to the enemy. As the celebratory dance reaches its climax, the avengers announce their real names and strike Mochizuki dead. As they bask in their success, the chorus sings the final lines of the play:

かくて本望遂げぬれば、かくて本望遂げぬれば、かの本領に立ち帰り、子孫に伝へ今の世に、その名隠れぬおんことは、弓矢の謂はれなりけり、弓矢の謂はれなりけり。

Having attained their long-cherished desire, having attained their long-cherished desire, they return to their ancestral lands, which they will pass down to their descendants,

together with their name, which is renowned owing to their martial prowess, owing to their martial prowess.<sup>52</sup>

In this play it is the enemy Mochizuki who is clearly the disruptive force; greedy for the lands of his slain cousin, he is as intent on murdering the three avengers as they are on killing him. His death in the midst of the celebratory motions of the lion dance marks a return to safety, stability, and order for the avengers. The final lines appropriately dwell on land, descendants, name, and continuity: the act of vendetta points towards a prosperous and stable future for the avenging family. The audience, moved by the combination of lively dance, felicitous music, and killing, is invited to partake emotionally of this positive, exciting, and ultimately reassuring construction of the act of vendetta.

We can see a similar, but even more elaborate, dynamic at work in the *Tale of Horie* (*Horie monogatari*), a complex work of late medieval fiction (*otozi-zōshi*) in which the act of vendetta is constructed not only as restorative of order, but as a politically powerful act that can earn the reward of the authorities and establish a new and ultimately conciliatory form of order.<sup>53</sup> In an inversion of the unease that attends the relationship between vendetta and public order in earlier works, here vendetta earns the immediate and unreserved imprimatur of the highest representative of authority. The climax of the Tale occurs when the young avenger Tsukiwaka

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<sup>52</sup> *Mochizuki*, in Yokomichi Mario and Omote Akira, eds, *Yōkyōkushū Vol. 2*, Nihon koten bungaku taikai 41 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1963), 397-402. The quotation is found on 402.

<sup>53</sup> By late medieval fiction, I refer to the broad body of texts typically known as *otogi-zōshi* (companion books) or *Muromachi monogatari* (Muromachi tales). Most of these works come down to us in manuscript form, or in woodblock printed editions from the early Edo period. The authorship and date of composition of most of these hundreds of tales is uncertain, but many of them appear to date from the Muromachi period. Many also exist in multiple variants, making matters of dating and authorship yet more complicated. Questions of readership also remain largely unresolved. *The Tale of Horie*, like many *otogi-zōshi*, is difficult to date with any precision. One manuscript lineage preserves a colophon dated Genna 4 (1618); it is likely, however, that the *Tale* circulated prior to this date. Watanabe Kyōichi cogently argues that the *Tale* has its origins in the late 15th or 16th centuries. See his “Muromachi monogatari to miyako, tennō: oiesōdō, fukushūdan ni okeru miyako, tennō,” *Nihon bungaku* 42, no. 7 (1993): 21-29. The *Tale* comes to us in two textual lineages, that of the 1618 manuscript, and that of an illustrated scroll attributed to Iwasa Matabee (1578-1650). I base my analysis here upon the 1618 lineage, as reproduced in Yokoyama Shigeru, ed., *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei*, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1984), 436-471.

launches an attack on two powerful men--called Sōma and the Middle Captain (*chūjō*)--who were responsible, years before, for the death of Tsukiwaka's parents and his own abandonment as an infant at a lake deep in the mountains. Having survived that abandonment, come of age, and learned the truth of his past and parentage, the now-powerful Tsukiwaka raises an army and sets out at once for the home of Sōma in northeastern Honshū, where he announces himself:

そも / \ いかなる物と思ふそ、せいわてんわう十一たい、ほり江三郎、よりいゑ  
には、ちやくし、月わかまるとは、わか事なり。なんじがはからひにて、ないり  
せんに、しつめしかども、しよてん、まもり給ふにより、みちのくの、いわせ殿  
に、やういくせられ、人となり、いま、なんじにあふ事の、うれしさは、いかに  
と、のたまへば、さうまは、ぜんごをわきまへず、こゝかしこへ、にけめくる  
を、いけどり給ひて、うらめしかりしおんを、ほうせんとして、のこぎりにて、く  
びをひく。そのおりふし、おくしは、京へのぼり給へば、十一さいになり給ふ、  
きんだち二人、さうまがむすめに、いでき給ふをも、たづねいたし、さしころ  
す。いなかのかたき、うちとりぬ、三みの中将を、うてやとてみやこへこそ、の  
ぼられける。さて、中将の、しゆくしよに、おしよせつゝ、やす / \ とうちと  
り、やがて、さんだい申ければ、みかどより、せんしには、いしくも、おやのか  
たきを、うちたりとて、かうづけ、しもづけ、むつのくに、三がこくをたび給  
ふ。

‘Who do you think I am? I am no other than the eleventh generation descendant of Emperor Seiwa, the heir of Horie Saburō Yoriie, Tsukiwakamaru! You plotted to have me drowned in the Hell Mountains, but through the protection of the many gods, I was brought up by Lord Iwase of Michinoku and came of age as a man. My joy at meeting you now is beyond measure!’ When Sōma heard this, he was completely at a loss. He tried to find one way or another to escape, but he was caught alive, and [Tsukiwakamaru], to express his own resentful anger, ordered his head cut off with a saw. At that time, the [Middle Captain] was away in the capital, and so his two eleven-year-old children were staying with Sōma’s daughter. [Tsukiwakamaru] sought them out and killed them.

Now that he had killed his enemies in the countryside, he thought to strike down the Middle Captain himself, so he went up to the capital, where he besieged his residence and easily killed him. He then presented himself at the palace. In a proclamation issued by the



Emperor, he was granted the provinces of Kōzuke, Shimotsuke, and Michinoku, in recognition of having splendidly dispatched the enemies killers of his parents.<sup>54</sup>

As in the conclusion of the *nō* play *Mochizuki*, above, we see revenge presented as a restorative act. Tsukiwaka's family had been nearly obliterated by the plotting of these two enemies, Sōma and the Middle Captain, who had conspired to steal Tsukiwaka's mother for the Middle Captain through bloodshed. When Tsukiwaka announces himself as he arrives to deal vengeance, he does so with a verbal performance that reaffirms his place within the family he lost as a child, presenting himself as the inheritor of a long, unbroken lineage. Tsukiwaka's revenge, however, is not only restorative. His actions are, without question, brutal and extreme: he gives full vent to his rancorous emotions by having Sōma beheaded with a saw, and his revenge extends even to the young children of his enemies. Yet rather than presenting these actions as sources of disruption and disorder, the narrative grants them the full approval of the emperor, who unites under Tsukiwaka's control the homelands of his father, his mother, and the foster family that raised him after his abandonment--an act that symbolically unites factions that have been in conflict throughout the narrative, and that makes of Tsukiwaka a more powerful figure than any of his family or enemies have been.<sup>55</sup> After the bloodletting is done, moreover, Tsukiwaka proves a figure of order and reconciliation in a world of chaos and conflict. He institutes regular prayers and memorial services--not only for his parents, but for his own victims, "without discrimination between friend and foe" (*kataki, mikata no shabetsu naku*); his memorial activities involve

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>55</sup> Conflict in the *Tale of Horie* originates in marriage politics gone sour between local magnates of Kōzuke and Shimotsuke provinces; the primary instigator is Tsukiwaka's maternal grandfather Hara Mochitoki of Shimotsuke. Mochitoki marries his daughter to the scion of the highly favored Horie family of Kōzuke, but regrets his decision when Horie falls on hard times. Mochitoki, with the aid of his retainer Sōma, seeks to take his daughter back from Horie and marry her to the Middle Captain, who has arrived as provincial governor, precipitating the bloodshed that leads to the deaths of both Horie and his wife--the parents of Tsukiwaka, who is subsequently raised by a powerful man from Michinoku.

public works and alms for the poor.<sup>56</sup> He administers his realm with mercy and compassion and lives a long and flourishing life. The disruptive energy that attends the avenger in earlier works becomes, in an already disordered world, a powerful force that can effect the establishment of a *new* order, with new figures of authority.

Watanabe Kyōichi, noting in particular the protagonist's promotion to a position of power through the direct word of the emperor, without the mediation of court or shogunate, sees this construction of vendetta as indicative of the *Tale's* having been composed during the Warring States period, a moment when powerful figures with their own armies were overturning older systems of authority and establishing new spheres of order throughout the land--a context in which it becomes possible for vendetta to be imagined as a force for, rather than opposed to, social order.<sup>57</sup> Vendetta is still represented as disruptive to orders of authority--Sōma and the Middle Captain are both politically powerful figures, as is the enemy Mochizuki in the play above--but those orders are themselves depicted as corrupt, dangerous and in need of overthrow. The morally sound violence of vendetta is thus imagined as a positive agent of change, its disruptive power now channeled, ultimately, in the direction of stability.

Although we see a distinct shift in the tensions that attend vendetta's disruptive potential, between earlier texts like the *Nihon shoki* and the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, and late medieval ones like *Mochizuki* and *The Tale of Horie*, one element remains consistent throughout these different portrayals of vendetta: it is always an extraordinary act, one that dramatically moves others and that has the power to affect even the most powerful figures in the land, be they shogun

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<sup>56</sup> *Horie*, 470.

<sup>57</sup> Watanabe Kyōichi, "Muromachi monogatari to miyako, tennō: oiesōdō, fukushūdan ni okeru miyako, tennō," *Nihon bungaku* 42, no. 7 (1993): 21-29.

or emperor. As an act that affirms primary family relationships through the personal risk and sacrifice of one or more family members on behalf of another, it always carries an exemplary charge, even if its personal motivations and violent means stand sometimes in uncomfortable tension with public order. Rooted not only in obligation but also in deeply felt emotion (remember Emperor Kenzō's words: "My breast is filled with anger and grief. I lie down and sob, I cry as I go about"), its exemplary quality carries an affective power that registers within the narratives as bringing observers to tears--even, in the case of *Soga*, one of its intended victims. The texts convey this affective power to the reader in different ways, whether through the felicitous excitement of a lion dance in *Mochizuki*, the darkly poetic scenes of final parting in the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, or simply the inclusion of scenes of weeping audiences within the narrative frame across a number of texts. However they do so, the texts offer the reader vicarious access to vendetta's power, a power that is portrayed as meriting the respect of the human world in part because it is largely beyond the bounds of the human everyday. This extraordinary quality of vendetta extends to the construction of the avengers themselves.

### **Exemplarity and Liminality: The Figure of the Avenger**

How then do these texts imagine these agents of vengeance, the avengers who accomplish the powerful and extraordinary act of vendetta? As noted above, vendetta is constructed as an exemplary and extraordinary act, an undertaking so impressive that it can move even its intended victims to tears, whatever its attending political consequences may be. How does this extraordinariness manifest within the figure of the avenger? In what way is an avenger exemplary--simply by virtue of having accomplished a vendetta? Or is the avenger portrayed as

somehow set apart from the ordinary order of human beings? If so, within what register of the text does this difference manifest, and how can it help us to achieve a deeper understanding of the broader imagination of vendetta in these texts?

One element that remains consistent across a wide variety of pre-Edo vendetta texts is the uncanniness or liminality of the avenger--a sense that the avenger partakes both of this world and of a realm that is somehow other than the ordinary order of human sociality. We can see a very basic hint of this aspect in the thrice-repeated connection between the avenger and "Heaven" (*tendō*) in the story from *Tales from Times Now Past* discussed briefly above. The nameless avenger is the first to draw this connection, as he crouches in the dark waiting to slit his enemy's throat:

祖ノ敵ヲ罰事ハ天道皆許シ給フ事也。我レ今夜孝養ノ為ニ思企ツルヲ、心ニ不違ヘ令為得給ヘ。

Heaven will pardon one who strikes down the killer of their forefather. Tonight I have conceived a plan to accomplish a filial act. May it succeed just as I imagine it!<sup>58</sup>

The avenger invokes a higher, unseen power to lend strength and legitimacy to his vengeful undertaking, a power that places his act of murder in a special category and separates it from other acts of killing. The validity of this connection to Heaven is later affirmed by the avenger's master the provincial governor, and by the narrator, reporting the general consensus of the bystanders moved by the avenger's act. The striking fact that the avenger in this story is never given a name on the one hand emphasizes his low social standing compared to the other, higher-ranking characters, but it also renders him a more abstract social entity than other characters in the story, whose names and titles explicitly situate them in a specific human order. The avenger's

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<sup>58</sup> *Konjaku monogatari shū*, 500.

master, for example, is introduced as the "Governor of Kamitsusa, Taira no Kanetada," and is identified as the "son of Taira no Shigemochi, the younger brother of the warrior Taira no Sadamori." Even a far less illustrious character like the enemy Tarōsuke is granted a name. The avenger, on the other hand, remains nameless, linked by the text only to a likewise nameless father, slain by the enemy Tarōsuke when the avenger was a child, and with Heaven.

The association between avengers and unseen or otherworldly powers is rendered more explicit in later texts. Tsukiwaka, the young avenger from the late medieval *Tale of Horie* (above), for example, is portrayed as having the protection of a powerful snake spirit, which delivers him unharmed from the remote mountains in which he has been abandoned as a child.<sup>59</sup> In a revenge narrative included in the medieval war epic *Taiheiki*, the young avenger Kumawaka is aided in his post-vendetta escape from the island Sadogashima, where the retainers of his slain enemy are searching high and low for him, by a mysterious mountain ascetic (*yamabushi*) who uses his powers to pull a departing boat back into the harbor and then vanishes into thin air once Kumawaka is safely aboard. The text identifies the ascetic as an incarnation of the Kumano deity (*Kumano gongen*), who had been worshipped by Kumawaka's slain father.<sup>60</sup> The conclusion of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers* suggests that the brothers themselves are transformed into angry ghosts after their deaths, and indeed the story of the avenging brothers appears always to have been connected to belief in vengeful spirits. This is particularly true of Gorō, whose very name

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<sup>59</sup> *Horie*, 464.

<sup>60</sup> Hasegawa Tadashi, ed., *Taiheiki 1*, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 54 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1994), 82-93. The identification of the ascetic with the Kumano gongen is made on 93. The *Taiheiki* is thought to have been composed in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

hints at the otherworldly, evoking as it does the word for angry spirit (*goryō*) and the rumbling of thunder (*gorogoro*).<sup>61</sup>

The Soga brothers also share another feature that is a common attribute of avengers: they spend much of the narrative on the borderland between childhood and adulthood. Many fictional avengers set out to achieve vengeance soon after undergoing the coming-of-age ceremony, and thus embark on their vendettas at the moment of transition between the world of the child and the world of the adult. When Tsukiwaka raises an army, beheads his enemy with a saw, and presents himself directly to the emperor in the *Tale of Horie*, he does so at the tender age of fifteen, having just undergone the coming-of-age ceremony. When Kumawaka from the *Taiheiki*, above, stabs his supine enemy through the chest with such force that the sword pierces the *tatami* beneath, we are informed that he is thirteen years old.<sup>62</sup> The youth of both of these avengers is suggested by their names--childhood names that incorporate the word *waka* (young). This position at the transition between childhood and adulthood imparts a liminal aspect to these young avengers, imbuing their adult actions with a sense of the alterity of childhood.

This liminal quality is perhaps most developed and complex in the characterization of the Soga brothers, for whom the two worlds of the adult and the child seem to flow uncannily into one another. As children, the brothers behave with a precocity beyond their years, intent already upon revenge when they are little more than toddlers; as adults, they seem willfully to ignore the responsibilities and political realities to which their peers have been socialized, and they continue

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<sup>61</sup> On the connection between Gorō's name and *goryō* belief, see Fukuda Akira, "Soga monogatari ni okeru ningenzō: Soga kyōdai," in *Gunkimono to minkan denshō*. (Tokyo: Iwasaki bijutsusha, 1972), 132-133, and Laurence R. Kominz, *Avatars of Vengeance: Japanese Drama and the Soga Literary Tradition* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1995), 20-23 and 27-30.

<sup>62</sup> The ages given here are counted according to the traditional system (*kazoedoshi*), which considers a child one year old upon birth; by the modern count, each of these young avengers is at least one year younger than the ages given in the text.

to speak of their vendetta not in terms of moral obligation, but in terms of the deep grief they have felt over the loss of their father ever since they were children. The brothers' unsettling precocity is dramatically illustrated on the thirty-fifth day memorial services for their murdered father, when the five-year-old Jūrō, at that time still known as Ichiman, suddenly appears carrying various implements that belonged to his father:

五歳になる一万は父が手馴れし蓑目・鞭なんどのありけるを取り副へて、「これは我が父御前の物なり。我もいつか十七、八に成て、この具足どもを身に随ふる程にもなれば、などか宮藤一郎を一目見て駭はざるべき。我が身の未だ竹馬なるこそ悲しけれ」と云ひければ、郎等共これを聞きつつ各声を調べて泣き合へり。

Five-year-old Ichiman appeared, having brought together his father's familiar whistle-tipped arrows and riding whip. "These items belonged to Father," he said. "Someday, when I become seventeen or eighteen years old, and will be old enough to carry these items by my side, there is no reason I won't be able to take aim at Kudō Ichirō [Suketsune]. How sad that now I am only big enough for a bamboo horse!" When the attendants heard this, they all raised their voices together in sobs.<sup>63</sup>

The juxtaposition between the small child and the adult implements he drags with him--suggestive of the burden of grief and violence that he will carry and be molded by over the course of the narrative--produces an effect at once moving and chilling, as it conveys in a single image both childish innocence and the lack thereof. Ichiman's own contrast between the adult warrior's horse he wishes to ride and the child's toy bamboo horse that is appropriate for a boy of his age highlights the effect: he is aware of his status as child, but he harbors the thoughts and (deadly) ambitions of an adult. Like those who shed tears at the sight within the story, the reader is invited to sympathize with and participate in the unhampered grief of the small child, and at the same time to marvel at it as something strangely different from the grief of normal children. There is a liminal aspect to the Soga brothers: they appear always to have one foot in the violent

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<sup>63</sup> *Manabon*, Vol. 1, 78.

and responsible world of adults, and another in the emotionally impulsive world of children. Even after the brothers come of age it is this childlike grief that remains their primary motivation; and when alternative means of managing the fact of their father's death are urged upon them--filing a formal suit, donning priests' robes and praying for his repose--they reject them all and remain fixated on revenge with the single-mindedness of petulant children.

This liminal quality of the avenger is not limited to age alone. In some instances it pervades the construction of the avenger wholly, in dress, social role, and language, constituting the avenger as a being simultaneously of two worlds, but wholly of neither. Perhaps the most sophisticated representation of this liminal quality is the late medieval *nō* play *Hōkazō*. The title itself refers to a liminal figure, a specific type of wandering medieval entertainer known as the *hōkazō*, who frequently adopted the appearance of a monk and included religious explication as part of his performance, without being formally ordained. In the play, two brothers--one an ordained monk and one a layperson--seek to avenge the murder of their father. They decide that the best way to approach their enemy is to disguise themselves as *hōkazō* and seek the attention of the enemy, who has a reputation for appreciating explications of esoteric religious concepts. Thus monk and layperson together adopt the disguise of a figure who is neither the one nor the other. Having transformed themselves, they comment on their new appearance:

シテ：面白のわれらが有様やな、僧俗二つの道を離れ、姿言葉も人に似ぬ、  
ツレ：そのふるまひを隠れがと、思ひ捨つれば安き身を、  
シテ：知らでなどかは迷ふらん

Older Brother: How amusing my appearance! Belonging neither to the world of the priest nor of the layperson, resembling others in neither appearance nor words...

Younger Brother: ...to conduct oneself thus is to be a true renunciant, able to toss away one's attachments and live in peace...



Older Brother: ...so why is it that, not knowing this, people instead wander lost?<sup>64</sup>

The brothers emphasize the simultaneous in-betweenness of their new appearance, which incorporates elements of the sacred and the secular but is ultimately quite *other*, "resembling others in neither appearance nor words." Moreover, their words specifically elevate this in-between quality, marking it as something that supersedes both the sacred and secular worlds, acquiring a power of its own by virtue of its in-betweenness. In this passage the language of the brothers itself undergoes a transformation; they begin to speak a kind of riddling double-speak, in which everything bears at least two different meanings simultaneously. It is a sort of parody of esoteric religious language, but its hidden meanings all point to the act of revenge. The word *kakurega* (literally "hiding place") in the lines above, for example, refers to the act of renunciation or separation from the profane world, but it also suggests the adoption of a disguise. The speculation about why people "wander lost," rather than renouncing emotional entanglements and experiencing freedom, also alludes ironically at the brothers themselves, who have adopted the appearance of the *hōkazō* not in order to renounce the world, but instead in the service of the vengeful emotions they harbor beneath their disguises.

This double-speak continues when they encounter the enemy at the sacred Mishima shrine. The enemy, who is interested in sacred matters, begins by drawing attention precisely to the disguised brothers' neither-here-nor-there appearance, quizzing them about the symbolic significance of various items they carry that are different from those possessed by ordained monks. When the talk turns to the bow and arrow carried at their waist, the older brother comments on its symbolism in esoteric terms, explaining that the curve of the bow makes it a

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<sup>64</sup> *Hōkazō*, in Yokomichi and Omote, *Yōkyōkushū 1*, 402-407. The quotation is found on 404. The authorship of *Hōkazō* is uncertain.

manifestation of the sun and moon, and that the rewards of meditation practice are identical to the effects of the arrow that cuts through evil. As he explicates, however, the younger brother begins drawing the bow, preparing to shoot the enemy dead. The older brother restrains him, and concludes his explanation with the lines:

さればわれらもこれを持ち、さればわれらもこれを持ちて、引かぬ弓、放さぬ矢  
にて射る時は、当たらずしかも、外さざりけりと、かやうに詠む歌もあり。

Well then we carry these items, well then we carry these items, as expressed in the poem:  
Firing the undrawn bow and the arrow that never lets fly, one does not strike the target,  
and neither does one miss it.<sup>65</sup>

The obscure language of the older brother is simultaneously incoherent and perfectly clear; disguised in his explanation is a message to the younger brother: "Don't kill him yet." Yet in the same gesture, the abstract explanation imbues the weapons the brothers carry with a sense of sacred power, and elevates the act of killing the enemy to the practice of a religious discipline. These interwoven strands of meaning become even more powerful when the enemy asks for an explication of the essence of their sect's teaching (*shūtei*). The older brother begins with nonsensical contradictions about explaining the unexplainable and expressing the inexpressible. He remarks upon the ultimate fallibility of language, but then concludes:

ただ一葉の翻る、風に行くへをご覧よ。

Observe the destination of the wind that blows past, fluttering a single leaf.<sup>66</sup>

From one perspective the line reads as a poetic religious riddle (or a parody of one). Yet from another perspective the leaf is none other than the soon-to-be-killed enemy, and the brothers are

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 405.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 405-406.

the winds that blow past and "flutter" it. The essence of the brothers' "religious school" can thus be understood as the act of vengeful violence that they are about to commit.<sup>67</sup>

Thus we begin to see a pattern whereby the extraordinary act of vendetta is imagined as performed by beings who are themselves extraordinary: part of this human world but also separate from it, imbued with or protected by powers (Heaven, serpents, deities) from the realm of the unseen, and characterized by a liminality and alterity that underscores their difference from the human order of which they are nonetheless also part. These uncanny accretions around the figure of the avenger may relate to the unique status of the act of killing that he commits. Murder, outside of other special contexts such as warfare, is typically a transgressive or forbidden act, one punished by the social community. Revenge in the imagination I have described, however, is constructed as a special type of murder: one rooted in moral values and relationships held in esteem by the community, committed for largely selfless reasons and at great personal risk on behalf of another, and in answer to a prior murder. It still constitutes an act of killing another human being, and yet it is simultaneously different from all other acts of killing; it does not carry the same blemish as other kinds of murder, which is perhaps why in a number of these narratives it is carried out by figures just emerging from childhood, and still imbued with traces of its innocence. The uniqueness and otherness of vengeful murder itself thus

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<sup>67</sup> It is noteworthy that the figure of the non-ordained, mendicant priest became in later years a symbol intimately linked to the imagination of the avenger. By the late Edo period, it becomes an established convention of revenge fiction that at some point the avenger adopt the disguise of the *komusō*, a quasi-religious mendicant whose bowl-shaped hat hid his face, and whose wanderings provided an opportunity for the avenger to scout out various communities in search of his enemy without arousing suspicion. Even as early as the 14th century, we find a link between such figures and revenge, in a brief vendetta narrative related in the *Essays in Idleness* (*Tsurezuregusa*, early 14th century) of Yoshida Kenkō (1283-1352?). Kenkō describes a vendetta carried out by one *komusō* (referred to by the more archaic name *boroboro*) upon another, and then comments on the nature of these figures in general, emphasizing (significantly) their in-between qualities: "They appear to have renounced the world, and yet their self-regard runs deep. They appear to follow the Buddhist path, and yet they are always getting into fights. They look as though they feel no shame over giving free reign to their violent whims, and yet they treat death lightly and show no sign of consternation. I thought them quite splendid..." Yoshida Kenkō, *Tsurezuregusa*, in Satake Akihiro and Kubota Jun, eds., *Hōjōki Tsurezuregusa*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 39 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 190.

emerges in part via the nature of the figure who commits it, a figure constructed as both of and not of the everyday human social order, partaking of a separate register that legitimates the act of killing, neutralizes the moral uneasiness that attends it, and validates its unique and exemplary status.

### **The Transgressive Enemy? On the Absence of Villains**

Who then are the victims of these liminal, powerful bearers of virtuous vengeance? Who is the enemy in pre-Edo revenge fiction and what does he represent? Is he characterized primarily by his act of initial violence alone, or is that act attended by other traits that lend an aura of transgression to his entire being? Is his death a straightforward matter of returning to him the act of murder that he once committed, or does a broader symbolic value attach to it? By the middle of the Edo period, when vendetta fiction has become a prominent staple of the popular fiction market and is governed by well-established conventions, it is very clear what an enemy represents: he is a villain, characterized by transgression and evil in word, thought, and deed. He exists in a moral universe in which goodness (*zen*) and evil (*aku*) are clearly articulated as separate and absolute concepts, and he embodies the latter.<sup>68</sup> A typical example of an Edo period enemy is the villain Takaizumi Kazuemon, from Jippensha Ikku's (1765-1831) *yomihon* of 1809 *The Woman's Education Primer: A Revenge (Katakiuchi Onna jitsugo kyō)*.<sup>69</sup> Kazuemon, who initially appears to be the most loyal of retainers, willing to sacrifice his life for his struggling master, is ultimately revealed to be a dastardly plotter. Driven by unchecked lust, he poisons his

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<sup>68</sup> The legacy of the conflation between the enemy and villainy on the Edo stage persists in the Japanese language today, in which the words *katakiyaku* (enemy role) and *akuyaku* (villain role) are largely synonymous, both corresponding to English "villain."

<sup>69</sup> Jippensha Ikku, *Katakiuchi Onna jitsugo kyō*, in Takagi Gen, ed., *Chūhongata yomihon shū*, 326-389, Sōsho Edo bunko 25 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1988).

master to death, attempts to force the master's widow to remarry to him, and tortures her brutally when she refuses; she barely manages to escape, setting the ultimate vendetta against Kazuemon in motion. Kazuemon's status as enemy is not simply a matter of having taken a human life; murderous towards his own master, a threat to the chastity of the master's widow, brutalizer of an innocent woman, Kazuemon is an unrepentant, wholehearted representative of transgression against the social hierarchy and against values (loyalty, female chastity) fundamental to early modern moral and social ideology. His elimination is not simply a matter of punishment, or even of revenge, but a symbolic removal of a transgressive, disturbing force from the human community. Such a figure helps to define the borders of that community, dramatically marking out its values and its outer boundaries of acceptable behavior. This clear association between the enemy and villainy is taken for granted by the latter half of the Edo period, but what of the enemy in pre-Edo texts? Is there a prehistory to the transgressive villainy of the early modern enemy?

In considering the relationship between vendetta practice and transgression, we may note that in the moral ideology that underlies the conception of vendetta as a virtuous act, the focus is less on punishing a transgressive enemy than on affirming a moral relationship to a slain family member. In the passages from the Chinese *Record of Rites* (quoted above) that first establish the moral soundness of vendetta, it is precisely the familial relationship between victim--father, brother, cousin--and avenger that receives emphasis. The enemy in these passages is more of an abstraction, defined simply as the perpetrator of a killing. When a moral grounding for vendetta is invoked in medieval texts, it is usually done with reference to a general "filial piety," through various expressions incorporating the character 孝. In the text from *Tales of Times Now Past*

quoted above, and also in the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, the specific term invoked is *kyōyō* (孝養), which Saeki Shin'ichi has argued can be understood as suggesting *kuyō* (供養): a memorial offering to the dead, which suggests that the moral dimension of vendetta is oriented more towards the memorializing of the slain family member than towards the punishment of a morally transgressive enemy.<sup>70</sup> And indeed, rarely in pre-Edo revenge narratives do we see unambiguously transgressive, villainous enemies. (I will discuss the rise and role of clear-cut villains during the Edo period in Chapter Four.)

One prominent strand that tends to characterize pre-Edo enemies in vendetta fiction is not moral villainy, but superior strength, which makes of the vendetta not a narrative of good overcoming evil, but of the weak overcoming the strong. The lines with which one of the avengers opens the *nō* play *Hōkazō* (introduced above) exemplify a narrative conceit that we find throughout the history of vendetta fiction:

かやうに候ふ者は、下野の國の住人、牧野の左衛門某が子に、小二郎と申す者にて候、さても親にて候ふ者は、相模の國の住人、利根の信俊と口論し、やみやみと討たれて候、親の敵のことにて候ふほどに、討たばやとは存じ候へども、かれは猛勢われらはただ一人にて、思ふにかひなく月日を送り候

"I am a resident of Shimotsuke Province, the son of Makino Saemon Such-and-Such, Kojirō by name. My father got into an argument with a resident of Sagami Province, one Tone no Nobutoshi, and was cut down by him. Because Tone is the killer of my father, I

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<sup>70</sup> Saeki, "Fukushū no ronri," 17-18. In the blood-feud revenge system of the Balkans--where, indeed, it was not considered necessary to kill the specific killer of one's own family member, but simply one of his male kinsmen--the act of revenge was apparently conceived of less as a punishment of the killer and more as an offering to pacify the soul of the deceased. Christopher Boehm argues that this emphasis on the soul of the victim was a moral strategy used by participants in blood feuds to understand their revenge practices as being in accord with the moral system of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, which treated murder as a sin. See Boehm, *Blood Revenge: The Anthropology of Feuding in Montenegro and Other Tribal Societies* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1984), 60. As in Japanese revenge, the act of revenge is committed on behalf of another, and the relationship to that family member is emphasized more than the relationship to the enemy. The nuance of the vendetta as a memorial offering to the deceased persists into the Edo period; one convention of late Edo illustrated fiction is to depict the presentation of the enemy's severed head to the memorial tablet of the deceased family member in the wake of the story's climax.

would like to cut him down, yet he is powerful, and I am only one. Even as I have longed to take revenge, the days and months have passed in vain..."<sup>71</sup>

This passage renders the initial killing that triggers the vendetta highly abstract, offering us little more than a bare-bones prehistory of conflict between two parties, culminating ultimately in a murder. It is enough to know that a man's father was killed for the narrative machinery of vengeance to be set in motion; there is no need to know the details of the argument that precipitated the killing or the moral character of either of the participants.

What is more charged in this opening passage, and in the play that follows, is the difference in power between the avenger and his enemy. "I would like to cut [Tone] down, yet he is powerful, and I am only one," laments Kojirō in the quotation above. We find this dynamic at play throughout pre-Edo vendetta fiction, beginning with the anecdote of the nameless avenger from *Tales of Times Now Past* discussed earlier. In that story, the avenger, a lowly attendant charged with the task of massaging his master Kanetada's back, first encounters the enemy when the enemy is presented as one of the chief retainers in a large retinue visiting Kanetada's mansion:

其ノ第一ニ居タル者ハ字ヲバ太郎介ト云。年五十余計ノ男ノ、大キニ太リテ鬚長ク、鑢ク怖シ氣也。現ニ吉キ兵カナト見タリ。兼忠此レヲ見テ、此腰叩ク男ニ、「彼レヲバ見知タリヤ」ト問ヘバ、男不知由ヲ答フ。兼忠、「彼レハ、汝が父先年ニ殺テシ者ノゾ。其時ハ汝ガ未幼カリシカバ、何カハ知ラム」ト云ヘバ、男、「父ノ、人ニ被殺ニケリトハ人申セドモ、誰ガ殺タルトモ知り不候ヌニ、此ク顔ヲ見知り候タルコソ」ト云ママニ、目ニ涙ヲ浮ベテ立テ去ヌ。

First among them was one called Tarōsuke. He appeared to be over fifty, large and heavy, with a long beard and an imposing, frightening air. It was clear to see that he was an excellent warrior. Kanetada, seeing him, asked the attendant massaging his back, "Do you

<sup>71</sup> Yokomichi Mario and Omote Akira, *Yōkyōkushū*, vol. 2, *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 41 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1963), 402-407. The quotation is on 403.

recognize him?" The man replied that he did not. Kanetada said, "He is the one who killed your father years ago. You were still a child at the time, so how could you [be expected to] recognize him?" The man replied, "People have [always] told me, 'Your father was murdered,' but I never knew who the killer was. But now that I know his face..." So saying, his eyes filled with tears, and he withdrew.<sup>72</sup>

The language of *Tales of Times Now Past* is spare, but even in its economical fashion this brief passage sets up a dramatic power contrast. The large warrior retinue visiting the mansion is impressive, and Tarōsuke is introduced as the most impressive among them--seasoned, large, threatening in aura: a man it would be difficult to kill under any circumstances. He stands in clear contrast to the man whose father he killed years before, a young (nameless) attendant who ranks low enough in Kanetada's household to be given the task of massaging his master's back. We learn nothing whatsoever of the circumstances of the initial murder, and Tarōsuke is never presented as a villain in a moral sense; he is simply a powerful, dangerous figure--one who clearly retains his freedom and status even after having committed an act of murder. The act of revenge as constructed in the story (for the young man does eventually succeed in finding a way to slit Tarōsuke's throat) is thus not one of a righteous hero symbolically ridding the social order of a dastardly villain, but of a weak being of low social standing fearlessly risking his life to subdue a much more powerful enemy, in the name of his father. This underdog narrative of the weak endangering themselves to attempt to overcome the strong has a compelling narrative force. We find it repeated in numerous texts, including, for example, the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, in which the two politically powerless young brothers aim to take the life of one of the shogun's most trusted retainers--and ultimately attempt to kill the shogun himself. Even in later medieval works like the Muromachi tale *Akimichi*, in which the avenger Akimichi is not a

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<sup>72</sup> Komine, ed., *Konjaku monogatari* 4, 499.



nameless or disenfranchised underdog but a strong warrior of good lineage and political standing, his enemy is still represented as an embodiment of superior strength: a cave-dwelling bandit of almost supernatural power, able to resist even the armies of the shogun (the story is set during the time of Yoritomo) and to vanish into thin air:

年々悪を好みし科によつて、鎌倉殿より、たばかりて三度まで討たんと御定めありけれども、討たれんことは中／＼思ひも寄らず、けつく、散々にはたらきて、若干の人を損ざし、行方知らず失せにけり。この者、海の底、山の中にも五日十日は隠れ居候へども、さらに人にも見えず、不思議の者なりとこそ聞へける。

Because of [this bandit's] taste for wickedness over the years, the Lord of Kamakura strategized and on three occasions made the decision to attack him, but the attacks never went as planned. In the end he always fought fiercely, killed and wounded many, and then vanished without a trace. He might have been hiding at the bottom of the sea or among the mountains for five or ten days; no one could catch sight of him. He was said to be a highly mysterious man.<sup>73</sup>

This initial characterization of the bandit-enemy thus sets up the same dynamic of weak versus strong that we have already seen: if even the armies of the shogun cannot defeat the bandit, how will the lone avenger succeed in doing so? Incidentally, the characterization of the bandit in terms of "wickedness" (*aku*) in this passage refers to his disruptive acts of banditry, but not to evil in a deeper moral sense; in the narrative he is in fact constructed as a complex, morally ambiguous, and in many ways sympathetic character. Indeed, he is in some ways more sympathetic than the avenger Akimichi himself.

Enemies in the vendetta fiction of the Edo period are also certainly presented as strong, threatening, and dangerous, but the power difference between enemy and avenger is not emphasized nearly as emphatically as it is in these earlier works. Perhaps reflecting the more

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<sup>73</sup> *Akimichi*, in Ichiko Teiji, ed., *Otogizōshi*, Nihon koten bungaku taikei 38 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1958), 394-410. The quotation is on 394-395.

ordered world of Edo Japan, in which a murderer was a clearly-designated criminal, and the pursuit of revenge was backed by the sanction of the authorities, in revenge fiction of the Edo period the enemy typically flees immediately into hiding upon committing the initial murder. In these earlier works, by contrast, the enemy usually lives an open existence in the wake of the initial murder, protected by arms and retainers--and in some cases, constituting an active, ongoing danger to the avenger himself. In the medieval *nō* plays *Mochizuki* and *Chikatō*, for example, the enemy is as intent upon murdering the avengers, and thus removing all further threat to his own life (and in the process consolidating his own power over lands), as the avengers are upon killing him. In *Chikatō* the enemy goes so far as to seek out the temple where the young sons of a man he killed are in residence; occupying the temple's main hall, he threatens to burn it to the ground--including the precious image of Bodhisattva Kannon it houses--unless the oldest son is handed over to him to be killed.<sup>74</sup> Yano Kimio draws upon these medieval plays and narratives to suggest that they reflect a violent medieval social context, one in which power was obtained by the sword, and in which the virtue of vengeance could be invoked to achieve material ends, such as the acquisition of land and the elimination of rivals. It is clear, Yano writes, that "for the warriors who were embroiled in ongoing eat-or-be-eaten strife in largely anarchic circumstances, these plots signified a grave reality: the act of revenge made it possible to recover lost lands, and justified one's own existence."<sup>75</sup> Pre-Edo revenge fiction and drama meets this "grave reality" from the position of the weak or unknown avenger who must face the existential danger of confronting a much more powerful enemy, and what is emphasized

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<sup>74</sup> "Chikatō," in Yokomichi Mario and Omote Akira, eds. *Yōkyōkushū* 2, 215-225. "Chikatō" is attributed to the late Muromachi playwright Kanze Nagatoshi (1488-1541).

<sup>75</sup> Yano Kimio, "Budō denraiki no sekai: seido ni fūjikomerareta jōnen," in *Saikaku ron* (Tokyo: Wakakusa shobō, 2003), 288.

is the sheer danger this enemy poses, his capacity to use tremendous violence to render those who oppose him helpless and achieve his aims. These texts offer the reader or viewer, therefore, the opportunity to partake of the experience of overcoming danger and neutralizing threat, to participate in the pleasure of weakness empowered and triumphant.

### Moral Questions and Entanglements

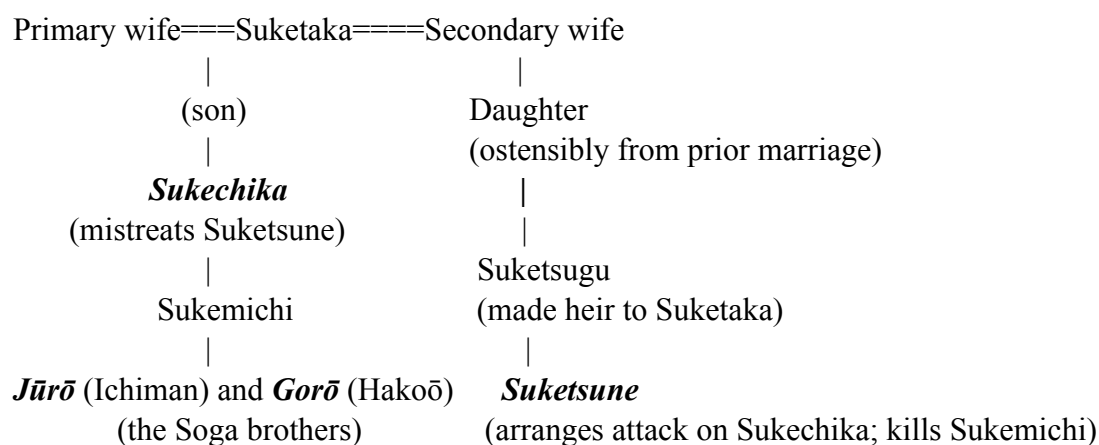
Dangerous strength, however, is not the only feature that characterizes enemies in pre-Edo revenge literature, nor is the initial killing that triggers the vendetta always portrayed through no more than an oblique reference the way it is in some of the texts discussed above. In a number of texts an elaborate backstory leads up to the initial killing, and the enemy is presented as a nuanced and complex character. The enemy of the Soga brothers, their cousin Kudō no Suketsune, is one such example. During the years of the Edo period Suketsune came to be portrayed in works based on the Soga story in purely negative terms, as a boor and a villain--to such an extent that in Jōkanbō Kōa's (dates uncertain) 1752 *dangibon* collection *Modern-Style Lousy Sermons (Imayō heta dangi)*, the ghost of Suketsune appears before a kabuki actor in order to lodge a complaint about his recent treatment on the kabuki stage, protesting that he is always portrayed as backwards and cruel, and is universally disliked.<sup>76</sup>

This fictional Suketsune's complaints are, in a sense, justified. If we look back to the earliest extant version of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, Suketsune is neither a boor nor a clear-cut villain. If anything, he is at times a highly sympathetic figure, one who has been a victim himself, denied his rights by a much more powerful enemy. For years, the young Suketsune finds

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<sup>76</sup> See Nakano Mitsutoshi, ed., *Inaka sōshi, Imayō heta dangi, Tōsei anasagashi*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai 81 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1990), 110-119.

himself disinherited by his uncle and guardian Sukechika, who does everything he can to wrest control of the family estates from the heir Suketsune and humiliate him in the process--at one point even forcibly remarrying his wife to another man. Blocked by Sukechika's political machinations from seeking redress through legal channels, it is only when Suketsune finds himself without any other recourse to regain control of the lands that are rightfully his that he resorts to violence, orchestrating an attack on Sukechika that ends up killing Sukechika's son--the father of the young Soga brothers--thereby setting in motion the machinery of the brothers' eventual vendetta.



Revenge in the family: origins of the inheritance dispute.

Thus Suketsune's actions are not those of an embodiment of moral evil, but of a victim pushed to his limits by a much stronger tormentor. What is more, the enmity between Suketsune and Sukechika is just one component of a larger web of resentments and revenges that are at play in the *Tale*. One reason that the Soga brothers attempt to kill the shogun Yoritomo after they eliminate Suketsune (his trusted retainer), is because Yoritomo was behind the downfall and death of their own grandfather Sukechika (the oppressor of Suketsune), who had earlier

murdered Yoritomo's infant child. In other words, there are no clear-cut heroes and villains in the *Tale*: there is, instead, a complex mesh of injuries, resentments, and revenges. Suketsune seeks redress for his grievances by attempting to kill Sukechika, and ends up killing Sukemichi. The Soga brothers (Sukemichi's sons) seek revenge for this killing against Suketsune. Yoritomo kills Sukechika as revenge for the murder of his own child. And Sukechika's grandsons will ultimately attempt to kill Yoritomo. In contrast to Edo revenge fiction, with its clearly defined moral heroes and villains, here everyone harbors a legitimate grievance against everyone else.

*Webs of resentment in The Tale of the Soga Brothers:*

Suketsune----->Sukechika (kills Sukemichi)

Sukechika----->Yoritomo (kills his child)

Yoritomo----->Sukechika

Soga Brothers----->Suketsune and Yoritomo

This dynamic of interlocking, back-and-forth transgressions and grievances suggests the flexibility of the moral meanings with which revenge literature can be invested at different moments in its rich and lengthy history in the archipelago. By the late Edo period, revenge fiction may be constructed as a clearly defined contest between virtue and evil, with virtue inevitably triumphant--and the Soga brothers may be re-imagined and their story rewritten in terms of this dynamic. Yet the moral universe of the original *Tale* has little to do with virtue or vice. Its moral terms are not defined in terms of positive virtues--even the brothers almost never invoke "filial piety" as a personal motivation--but rather in terms of the torments wrought by rancorous emotion. Fukuda Akira has suggested that the intense focus on emotion in the *Tale*--its web of vengeful obsession in which all characters carry deep resentments--and its general atmosphere of gloom, violence, and mourning, are elements fostered by the oral life it lived

before being transcribed. The *Tale* is believed initially to have been spread and embellished by blind female storytellers known as *goze*, whose act of telling the story of the dead brothers comprised a form of spirit pacification and an incitement to religious awakening. The final book of the original *Tale*, in fact, primarily consists of accounts of the religious services held for the brothers' spirits, the tonsure and religious activities of people--most notably the brothers' mother and Jūrō's lover, the courtesan Tora--moved by the brothers' fate to renounce the world. The female religious figures who wander the countryside in this last book performing services and praying for the brothers, moreover, are thought to be representatives within the *Tale* of the *goze* themselves, the women who first propagated the story in oral form.<sup>77</sup> For the quasi-religious storytellers who propagated the *Tale*, Fukuda argues, the human world was equivalent to the ghostly world of the vengeful dead, chained and motivated by bonds of rancor and in desperate need of salvation.<sup>78</sup> The tale of the brothers' revenge was a powerful vehicle for leading the suffering to a spiritual awakening. In this sense, the moral world of the *Tale* is constituted not in terms of heroes and villains, virtue and its transgression, but in terms of the dangers of attachment and emotional investment in a human order that is already damaged beyond repair. In such a world, where everyone is bound by powerful chains of resentment, there is no place for a moral characterization as straightforward as that of villainy.

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<sup>77</sup> There is believed to be a link between the title *goze* and Jūrō's lover Lady Tora (Tora *gozen*), the primary wandering religious figure of the last book, moved by her deep love for Jūrō to enter the religious path and pray ceaselessly for his repose in the afterlife. For a succinct discussion of *goze*, their link to the figure of Tora *gozen*, and the oral propagation of the *Tale*, see for example Ishii Susumu, *Chūsei bushidan*, Nihon no rekishi vol. 12 (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1974), esp. 31-32 and 76-77. A more detailed discussion can be found in Fukuda Akira, "Soga monogatari ni okeru ningenzō: Soga kyōdai," in his *Gunkimono to minkan denshō* (Tokyo: Iwasaki bijutsusha, 1972), esp. 133-135.

<sup>78</sup> Fukuda, "Soga monogatari ni okeru ningenzō," 129-141.

## Conclusion

In a recent study on English revenge drama, Linda Woodbridge links the boom in revenge drama on the Elizabethan stage to the economic inequalities of early modern England and to the rise of new knowledge and practices within early modern merchant culture; behind the eye-for-an-eye violence of revenge tragedy she sees not only the reflection of a harshly punitive judicial system, but also the rise of double-entry bookkeeping (which kept clear track of debts and credits) and algebra (a mathematics of equivalences). She locates the highly monetary language of revenge in these plays within this matrix, exemplified in expressions of *making one pay* and *getting even*.<sup>79</sup> Cambodian concepts of revenge have traditionally operated according to a very different economy. In his suggestively titled article "A Head for an Eye: Revenge in the Cambodian Genocide," Alexander Laban Hinton examines what he terms the "Cambodian cultural model of disproportionate revenge," according to which an initial injury is repaid not in kind, but in excess, with a goal of asserting one's superiority to the enemy and deterring the possibility of further retaliation.<sup>80</sup> He quotes Haing Ngor: "If I hit you with my fist and you wait five years and then shoot me in the back one dark night, that is *kum*" (disproportionate revenge).<sup>81</sup> Revenge in the Balkans, meanwhile, was dominated over centuries by the practice of the blood feud, whereby a man's murder is avenged by a male kinsman upon one of the male kinsmen of the murderer, often in escalating, back-and-forth fashion. This ideology of revenge

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<sup>79</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *English Revenge Drama: Money, Resistance, Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), particularly chapters 3 ("Balancing the Books") and 4 ("Payback Time").

<sup>80</sup> Alexander Laban Hinton, "A Head for an Eye: Revenge in the Cambodian Genocide," *American Ethnologist* 25:3 (August, 1998): 352-377.

<sup>81</sup> The Haing Ngor quote is given on 357; the original can be found in Ngor, *A Cambodian Odyssey* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 9. In his chilling article, Hinton examines the appearance of this "cultural model" of revenge in 19th century Cambodian literature, and then illustrates the ways in which it was invoked and cultivated, with horrific consequences, by the Khmer Rouge in the time of the Killing Fields.

employs the language of "blood" (Serbian *krv*, Albanian *gjaks*)--"blood revenge," "blood enemy," to be "in blood" (in a state of feud)--and the culture of revenge dispute accordingly requires close attention, a kind of scorekeeping, to keep track of the ways and amounts in which blood has been spilled on each side of the conflict. Traditionally it was also governed by sets of rules that established who could take revenge against whom, and when, and in what fashion.<sup>82</sup> As these examples suggest, when we attend to the diversity of ways revenge has been imagined and practiced in different times and societies, we begin to understand the extent to which "revenge," despite its apparently shared basic structure, ultimately takes shape and acquires significance within an ever-shifting matrix of language, culture, and historical moment.

I have attempted to trace some of the contours of the way revenge was imagined in literary works of the Japanese archipelago prior to its formal regulation during the Edo period, and before the accompanying explosion in vendetta works facilitated by the rise of woodblock printing and a commercial market for popular literature. As I suggested at the opening of the chapter, the discourse of revenge in the centuries prior to the founding of the Tokugawa shogunate was a *process*, always in a state of dynamic flux shaped by moment, audience, genre, and ideology. Yet I have also attempted to show that within this sea of texts we can discern

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<sup>82</sup> For an in-depth ethnohistorical approach to blood vengeance in the Balkans, see Boehm, op. cit. So detailed were the rules of revenge and scorekeeping that at one time in Albania they included provisions relating to guard dogs, stipulating circumstances under which the killing of a guard dog could be considered equivalent to the murder of a man, and therefore necessitating the subsequent murder of a man; likewise, a dog could (under specific circumstances) be considered a murderer equal to a man. See Boehm, 110-111. Boehm describes a neutral method he devised to elicit opinions about vengeance from his Montenegrin informants, asking for their personal responses to a lengthy list of words. Included in this list was the word *osveta*, which carries a similar semantic range to English "vengeance." Over half his informants responded to the word specifically with descriptions of blood vengeance (*krvna osveta*) and homicide, indicating the extent to which the concept of blood revenge still dominates the Montenegrin imagination of revenge over a century after it was formally outlawed. While not legal, and not as prevalent as it was up through the early years of the 20th century, blood vengeance has remained an active practice in parts of Montenegro and Albania, with a notable resurgence in Albania after the fall of the Communist regime in the 1990s. For a complex and compelling literary treatment of traditional Albanian revenge practices that presents compelling material for comparison with the imagination of vendetta in Japan, see Ismail Kadare, *Broken April* (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1990).



certain general patterns. Understanding these patterns will inform my examination of early modern revenge texts in the chapters that follow.

The most fundamental pattern underlying the representation of revenge in all of these texts is the shape of revenge itself. Revenge proper throughout the premodern discourse of vendetta involves more than the basic arithmetic articulated at the opening of the chapter, whereby “B, injured by A, does to A what A did to him.” As with Balkan revenge, revenge in these texts requires a third party--C--who seeks homicidal revenge on B’s behalf; this C always stands in a specific, morally and emotionally charged relationship (usually familial) to the slain B. The moral identification of this pattern with the virtue of filial piety, and its connection to the personal, negative emotions (grief and rancor) of the avenger, charge the representation of vengeance in many of these texts with a tension between celebrating the affecting exemplarity of the avenger, and checking his disruptive potential vis-a-vis social order and authority. As I have shown, this tension weakens in the late medieval period, and as the following chapters will show, in the literature of the Edo period it becomes conventional to represent vendetta as an unproblematically celebratory act, one that affirms rather than upsets the proper social order. Yet we shall also see that the disruptive potential of revenge remains an element in the representation of vendetta, albeit at a sometimes subtle frequency, in the capacity of the vendetta theme to frame a *critique* of certain aspects of the social order and its ideology. This potential for critique will no longer be as overt as it is in the vendetta of the Soga brothers, directly targeting the highest authority figures in the land, but we shall see it manifest distinctly in different forms throughout each of the chapters to follow.

I have also argued that these pre-Edo texts consistently charge the figure of the avenger with a sense of liminality and alterity, characterizing him as both of the everyday human order and simultaneously beyond or outside it. Many specifics of the construction of the avenger will change in and throughout the Edo period, but this characterization of the avenger as an extraordinary, liminal figure continues in certain important ways. Indeed, I will argue in the following chapter that it is precisely the liminal status of the Edo period avenger, as a figure temporarily loosed from the bonds and protections of the broader communities that construct his social identity, that lends early modern vendetta fiction one potent aspect of its critical potential. Finally, I have argued that the figure of the enemy in these pre-Edo texts is consistently defined in terms of power and threat, but rarely in terms of pervasive moral transgression or all-out villainy. Understanding that the construction of the enemy as an embodiment of pure villainy is very much a phenomenon of the late Edo period--the time of vendetta fiction's most intensive production--will prove crucial to understanding the deeper connection between the moral universe represented in vendetta works of that time and the broader cultural and political context of their moment, as I will discuss in Chapter Four.

## Chapter Two:

### Revenge and Relationality: Vengeance and the Early Modern Self

We are deep in a stone tunnel, in the dead of night, sometime in the year 1746. An aged monk named Ryōkai has just succeeded, after twenty-one years of struggle with rudimentary tools, in opening a passage through sheer rock that will create a safe passage for travelers in Kyūshū, bypassing a treacherous river gorge that has claimed numerous lives. Years before, as a young servant in a samurai household, Ryōkai had killed his own master; digging this tunnel is his act of atonement. Beside Ryōkai in the cave crouches Jitsunosuke, the slain master's son, who has located the monk after ten years of searching, longing to avenge his father's murder. Initially prevented from doing so by stonemasons who, inspired by Ryōkai, assist him with his digging, Jitsunosuke has secured a promise from Ryōkai that upon the day the tunnel is complete, he can kill him and take his revenge. The moment finally arrives, deep in the night, when Ryōkai's mallet breaks through the tunnel wall. Moonlight pours through. Ryōkai and Jitsunosuke are alone in the tunnel:

「いざ、実之助殿、約束の日じゃ。お斬りなされい。かかる法悦の真中に往生致すなれば、極楽浄土に生るること、必定疑いなしじゃ。お斬りなされい。明日ともなれば、石工共が、妨げを致そう、いざお斬りなされい」と彼のしわがれた声が洞窟の夜の空気に響いた。が、実之助は、了海の前に手を拱ねいて坐ったまま、涙に咽んでいるばかりであった。心の底から湧き出ずる歓喜に泣く凋びた老僧の顔を見ていると、彼を敵として殺す事などは、思い及ばぬ事であった。敵を打つなどと云う心よりも、このか弱い人間の双の腕に依って成し遂げられた偉業に対する驚異と感激の心とで、胸が一杯であった。彼はいざり寄りながら、再び老僧の手を執った。二人は其処に凡てを忘れて、感激の涙に咽び合うたのであった。

‘Well, Jitsunosuke, it is the promised day. Strike me down. If I die as happy as I am now, there is no doubt I will be reborn in paradise. Well then, strike me down. Tomorrow the stonemasons will try to prevent you. Go ahead, strike.’ His hoarse voice echoed in the cave’s night air. But Jitsunosuke, sitting with folded hands before Ryōkai, could only sob. Looking at the withered face of this old monk, who cried with a joy that welled from the depths of his heart, he could not fathom killing him as an enemy. More than any thought of striking an enemy, his heart was filled with wonder and emotion at the tremendous feat this frail human being had accomplished with his own two arms. Shuffling forward on his knees, he once again grasped the old monk’s hands. There the two men forgot everything, and they sobbed together, overwhelmed by emotion.<sup>83</sup>

Thus concludes Kikuchi Kan’s (1888-1948) famous revenge story, “Beyond Love and Hatred” (*Onshū no kanata ni*), published in 1919: a story of vengeance overcome. The aged Ryōkai’s herculean act of penance has so overwhelmed the avenger that he loses all desire for revenge and spares the life of his father’s killer.

When I began researching the wide body of early modern Japanese vendetta fiction, I expected to come across a large number of stories like that of Ryōkai and Jitsunosuke: narratives centered around the complicated moral and human relationship between an avenger and his enemy, which I imagined to be the fundamental human relationship of any revenge story--a relationship that made of forgiveness a real narrative possibility. Only as my research progressed and I read more revenge narratives from the Edo period itself, written when vendetta was still a living, contemporary practice, did I begin to realize that an early modern reader would in fact be baffled by Kikuchi’s twentieth century imagining of Edo period revenge. The story, appropriately, ends sealed off from the world, deep in a tunnel at midnight; what would happen, I began to wonder, when Ryōkai and Jitsunosuke stepped out into the light of day? They would be forced to confront the webs of social relations that governed early modern personhood, webs

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<sup>83</sup> Kikuchi Kan, “Onshū no kanata ni,” *Kikuchi Kan zenshū*, vol. 2 (Takamatsu: Takamatsushi Kikuchi Kan kinenkan, 1993), 291. The story was first published in *Chūō kōron* in January of 1919, and it is considered one of the works that established Kikuchi’s reputation as a writer. Kikuchi later reworked it into a play, *Beyond Vendetta* (*Katakiuchi ijō*).

which, I began to understand, constitute the real human relations at the heart of Edo period revenge narratives, far more than that between the avenger and his enemy. Why would a character like Jitsunosuke forgive Ryōkai, a complete stranger, when that act would inflict grave, irredeemable injury on the most important relationships of his life--with his household, his community, and his lord? Forgiving Ryōkai would render Jitsunosuke an unfilial son, a negligent heir, and a morally failed samurai: in short, a social nonentity in the terms of early modern Japan. Even if Jitsunosuke were to forgive Ryōkai in his own heart, pushing aside filial emotions towards his slain father, he would still have a crucial social performance to complete in the act of revenge. What makes Jitsunosuke think that the act of revenge is his to forswear?

In the previous chapter, I examined revenge narratives of the ancient through late medieval periods. In this chapter, I focus exclusively on the early modern period. I seek to explore the social relationships that are involved in the constitution of selfhood in the Edo period, and to argue that these relationships--with the household, the status community, and the ruling authority--are the fundamental human and moral relationships that underlie early modern revenge fiction. Choosing narratives in which, as in Kikuchi Kan's modern story, revenge is in some way questioned, I will show that this questioning is never represented as a matter of an autonomous agent choosing of his own initiative to forgive an enemy, but as a matter of a distinctly early modern version of the self wrestling with the claims made upon it by the social relationships that shape and guarantee its being.<sup>84</sup> This dynamic makes of early modern revenge

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<sup>84</sup> When I use "self" or "individual" in this chapter, I mean at the most basic level a single *person*, in contrast to a group or community of human beings. I do *not*, unless otherwise indicated, intend the term to suggest the autonomous, unitary, bounded subject of Western modernity. As the following discussion will show, I am particularly concerned with the ways in which personhood in early modern Japan was highly contingent upon social recognition by broader communities, usually on the basis of the individual's capacity to perform certain obligations to those communities. In this sense, a person's identity was not self-contained, but was largely determined in terms of his or her *relationship* to those communities.

fiction a site in which the individual's relation to these larger social communities can be reaffirmed, re-imagined, or even critiqued, and it makes vendetta fiction an invaluable window into the ways the challenges presented by these relationships were imagined by early modern authors and their audiences.

I begin with a discussion of the highly relational nature of early modern Japanese identity, outlining the system of social obligation and support that validated and protected the individual self during the Edo period. I then highlight vendetta's unique relationship to this system: an act of filial piety that reaffirms the individual's position vis-a-vis these fundamental social relationships, the pursuit of vendetta in revenge fiction also conventionally cuts the avenger temporarily loose from their immediate bonds of support and protection. This unique social position, I argue, makes the figure of the avenger a powerful site for examining the relationship between the early modern individual and its social communities. Through an examination of revenge tales by Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693), I show that when the act of revenge is questioned in early modern vendetta fiction, it is not a matter of an individual forgiving his enemy, but a matter of an avenger having to make difficult choices between conflicting social responsibilities in the absence of his accustomed webs of social protection. I then turn to a revenge story by Ueda Akinari (1734-1809)--inspired by the same legend upon which Kikuchi Kan based his modern story--to demonstrate that this narrative dynamic contains the potential for the critique and re-imagining of the individual's relationship to these fundamental social forces. I conclude with a discussion of a text by Santō Kyōden (1761-1816) that presents a contrast between the socially validated revenge of a filial human avenger and the morally problematic violence of a vengeful ghost. Through this contrast I consider the powerful but forbidden appeal

of breaking with all webs of social obligation in the pursuit of purely personal justice, a fantasy ultimately possible only in the pages of a book.

The texts that I discuss span the early through late Edo period and cross the genres of *ukiyo-zōshi* and two different varieties of *yomihon*; there are, needless to say, significant differences in their modes of narration, their intended audiences, and their historical moments.<sup>85</sup> By bringing them together in one chapter, however, I hope to demonstrate that there is a shared social dynamic underlying these texts that coheres as unique to the Edo period, particularly in contrast to the revenge fiction of other periods discussed in the previous chapter.

### **The Social Constitution of Selfhood in Tokugawa Japan**

To understand why the behavior of a character like Jitsunosuke might confound an early modern reader, it is necessary to understand the highly relational nature of early modern Japanese selfhood under the Tokugawa social system. This was a society in which persons were recognized as such in terms of their relationships to larger social communities; it was a society composed not of independent, autonomous individuals but of households and status groups. The household (*ie*) constituted the fundamental unit of social organization. Individuals were formally

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<sup>85</sup> *Ukiyo-zōshi* (literally “books of the floating world”) refers to a body of popular prose literature published primarily in the Kamigata region between the late 17th and mid-18th centuries. The modern reception of *ukiyo-zōshi* has emphasized their realistic depiction of the lives of townsmen and the world of the pleasure quarters, but the body of works subsumed today under the term *ukiyo-zōshi* is in fact highly amorphous and includes works on the samurai class, tales of the supernatural, and essays. Modern literary history traditionally links the establishment of *ukiyo-zōshi* to Ihara Saikaku’s publication of *The Life of an Amorous Man* (*Kōshoku ichidai otoko*) in 1682, although the term *ukiyo-zōshi* was not in fact employed until the 18th century. *Yomihon* (literally, “reading book”) is a similarly catch-all term for a wide range of prose fiction published between the mid-18th century and the end of the Edo period, which very generally share a concern with history and the supernatural, and which to varying degrees bear the influence of Chinese vernacular fiction of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Akinari work I shall examine, *Tales of the Spring Rain* (*Harusame monogatari*) bears the characteristics of *yomihon* published in the Kamigata region, which often consist of short narratives published in collections. The Kyōden work I shall examine, *The Pond of Asaka* (*Asaka no numa*) is one of the founding works of the Edo-based *haishimono yomihon*, much longer, unified works with highly convoluted plots and didactic moral frameworks, of which Kyōden and Kyokutei Bakin are the most famous authors.

registered as members of households and were subject to the authority of the household head, who served as the social representative of the household as a whole. The household was not simply a kinship group, but a corporate entity encompassing blood and marriage kin, adopted members, servants, and ancestors.<sup>86</sup> Its primary goal was self-perpetuation; in this sense the welfare of the household as a comprehensive entity took priority over the welfare and desires of the members that comprised it, each of whom had specific obligations to perform to ensure its continued vitality. In return, their membership in this fundamental social unit was affirmed, guaranteeing them a social place in the eyes of the authorities and the broader community, and affording them a degree of support and protection.<sup>87</sup>

It was as a household that taxes were paid and formal duties performed for the larger status community (*mibun dantai*) of which the household was part. This status community, in turn, was a social unit defined largely by the occupation of the households within it (the village for farmers, the retainer troop for samurai, etc.). This unit performed for the ruling authority certain duties, defined by the nature of the group, in exchange for a considerable degree of

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<sup>86</sup> I have elected to translate *ie* as “household” to highlight its corporate nature and its difference from the exclusively kin-based community suggested by “family.” For an insightful discussion of the difficulties of finding a comprehensive English equivalent for *ie*, and the ways in which terminology choice highlights different aspects of this complicated social unit, see Kathleen Uno, “Questioning Patrilineality: On Western Studies of the Japanese *Ie*,” *positions* 4, no. 3 (1996): 569-594. Uno, whose discussion treats studies of both the early modern and modern periods, highlights the fact that household norms were a matter of ideology more than a rigid, universal structure; there was a great deal of variation across the archipelago, with many divergences from the ideological norms. My description of the household here refers to the early modern ideological norm. It is also worth noting that English terms such as “household” and “family” are no less historically fraught than the term *ie*. The English word *family* comes from Latin *familia*, which was in fact a unit more akin to the early modern Japanese use of *ie*, comprising as it did non-kin such as servants. It was not until the 15th century that English “family” began to signify a kin-group, and not until the 17th century that it acquired the sense of “a small group confined to blood relatives,” though its use to refer to a household including non-kin servants did fully not disappear until the 18th century. See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 131-134.

<sup>87</sup> One sign of the status of the household as an entity greater than the sum of its members is the fact that it could continue to function even in the absence of any of the original kin around which it was constituted. See Uno, “Questioning Patrilineality,” 575, for reference to practices that enabled non-kin to rehabilitate a household that had temporarily died out or was in danger of doing so.



autonomy with regard to internal affairs. Status (*mibun*) was not simply a matter of membership or organization, but included “the formal duties (*yaku*) that accompanied such membership,” and the ability to perform such duties to the status group was crucial to one’s guarantee of membership within the group.<sup>88</sup> So crucial was status to the social and political order of the Tokugawa world that social being was largely unimaginable without membership within a status group; even socially marginal figures such as beggars who had fallen out of other status groups, often because of an inability to uphold their obligations to the community, were inducted into official “outcaste” status groups that functioned with a formal structure and a dynamic of self-regulation and obligations akin to any other status group.<sup>89</sup>

Together as a community, the status group performed duties for the ruling authority (paying taxes and performing labor, or in the case of samurai, serving in domain administration), and the ruling authority in turn guaranteed the safety and welfare of the community. Under the fragmented political structure of Tokugawa Japan, this ruling authority could be the domain lord or the representative of the shogunate, depending on the location of the community. A person’s relationship to this authority structure was not a simple matter of being bound by its laws, but was a reciprocal relationship in which service to the authority, through the channels of household and community--even as a member of a socially marginal “outcaste” group, performing

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<sup>88</sup> David L. Howell, “Territoriality and Collective Identity in Tokugawa Japan,” in “Early Modernities,” special issue, *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 106.

<sup>89</sup> See *ibid.*, 107-108. Howell also points out that status “as a legal institution...was not a conscious creation but rather the product of an interconnected series of measures implemented under the hegemonic authority of Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi and built upon by the early Tokugawa shoguns...[A]ssigning legal statuses to groups of people was not the principle motive behind these policies, but they came together nonetheless as a system.” See *ibid.*, 109-111. For a concise but thorough overview of the status system in early modern Japan, see Asao Naohiro, “Kinsei no mibun to sono hen’yō,” in Asao Naohiro, ed., *Mibun to kakushiki* (Nihon no kinsei, vol. 7) (Tokyo: Chūō koron sha, 1992), 7-40. For a highly nuanced exploration of the operation of status in the context of intravillage politics, and in connection with class, institutions, and law, see Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), esp. ch. 3, “Status Power,” 125-191.

“polluting” work such as waste disposal or leatherwork that were of service to the ruler--guaranteed both protection and social recognition.

An inventive way of thinking about the crucial importance of these relationships of belonging and obligation to any individual’s selfhood is summarized by Kurachi Katsunao’s imagination of what an early modern name card (*meishi*) would look like, had such documents of represented identity existed in the Edo period. Whereas a modern name card prominently displays an individual’s name and identifies his or her place within a professional context, the name card Kurachi proposes for an early modern man named Tarō lists the fundamental social units that define his identity: first the name of his lord, signifying the specific authority structure under which he lives (the lord of a domain, or the local representative of the shogunate if on shogunal lands), followed by his own village or town (representing not a geographic address, but his corporate status group), then the name of the head of the household to which he belongs, and his own position within that household (son, servant, retainer), and finally his own name, Tarō.

As Kurachi summarizes:

‘Tarō’ does not stand alone as a naked individual. He is enmeshed in three relationships: with the rule of his lord (*ryōshu shihai*), with his status group (*mibun dantai*), and with his household (*ie*). These three relationships are relationships of obligation and protection, service and support. Within these relationships ‘Tarō’ occupies a fundamentally subordinate position, but by virtue of that position he can receive support for his livelihood (*seikatsu*). To put it the other way, if he were forsaken by these three individual relations, he would lose any guarantee of his own livelihood--indeed, of his very life (*inochi*).<sup>90</sup>

John W. Hall, addressing the same issues, describes Tokugawa Japan as a “container society,” its society “a series of boxes or containers which confined the individual but also served to limit the

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<sup>90</sup> Kurachi Katsunao, *Tokugawa shakai no yuragi*, Zenshū Nihon no rekishi 11 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 2008), 19-22.

arbitrary exercise of authority upon him.”<sup>91</sup> In this “container society,” the individual’s selfhood was thus highly relational, taking shape within a reciprocal social dynamic of obligation and support; failure to fulfill one’s social obligations threatened the very being of the individual, because being was socially dependent. These relationships affected even the individual’s appearance: hairstyle, dress, the display of crests, the number of swords worn at the waist, all provided social clues indicating the larger social relationships in which the individual was enmeshed.<sup>92</sup> These relationships defined as well the spatial being of the individual, rooting him or her in a village, a city ward, or a castle town; if he traveled, he did so as a member of these communities, usually carrying documents that described his position within them.<sup>93</sup>

In the story from 1919 with which I opened the chapter, Kikuchi Kan affords his avenger Jitsunosuke certain trappings of an early modern identity, but Jitsunosuke’s attitude and behavior ultimately point to his creation by a 20th century writer. We learn that his motivation for revenge is a combination of personal fury over the murder of his father and a vague desire to revive his household, which has been officially disbanded by the authorities in the wake of his father’s murder. Yet these motivations are presented as matters of personal emotion and ambition, not as social obligations. When his personal rancor wanes, so does his desire for revenge, regardless of his filial obligations to his slain father. While he speaks of reviving his household, this is presented as a matter of personal ambition: we meet no fellow household members whose own

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<sup>91</sup> John W. Hall, “Rule by Status in Tokugawa Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 1, no. 1 (1974): 45.

<sup>92</sup> For an example of the highly complicated forms dress prescriptions could take for purposes of displaying and differentiating levels of status, see Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice*, 177-178.

<sup>93</sup> See Constantine Nomikos Vaporis, *Breaking Barriers: Travel and the State in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), Appendix 2, 267-268, for examples of early modern travel permits, which, while not standardized in form, usually list the bearer’s home community, identify his or her position within a household, and list the authorities under whose auspices he or she has requested the permit.

social being rests upon his successful completion of the vendetta, and his forgiveness of Ryōkai is presented as a purely personal choice, the result of his own experience of Ryōkai as a human being. We learn that he has officially registered the vendetta with the authorities, but we learn of no personal relationship to a lord that can only be redeemed by the act of revenge. In other words, Jitsunosuke's pursuit of revenge is presented as the personally driven quest of a socially independent individual. It is appropriate that this modern story's conclusion and its act of forgiveness are set in a cave in the dead of night. Most Edo period revenge narratives end with the celebratory reintegration of the successful avenger into his most meaningful human relationships, but what reintegration could await a figure like Jitsunosuke? From the perspective of the relationships that defined identity in the early modern period, an avenger who willfully let his father's killer go unpunished would have failed in his obligations as a son, as a samurai, and as a moral subject of the domain. He would become a social nonentity, a ghost.

### **Vendetta as Reaffirmation of and Break from Social Relations of Selfhood**

Early modern revenge was not a personal matter limited to the relationship between an individual and his enemy, but a social act that reaffirmed the avenger's entanglement within the webs of social relations that defined him. Revenge proper, as discussed in the previous chapter, was explicitly constructed as a filial act whereby one sought revenge for the unjust killing of an elder family member: a father, an older brother, an uncle. It was never a matter of avenging an offense against oneself, but always of avenging the death of another with whom one stood in a very specific, hierarchical relationship within the context of the household. The act of embarking on a vendetta thus reaffirmed a hierarchical set of family relations, underscoring the obligations

held by certain members in the household structure towards others, on whose behalf they were expected to be willing to risk their own lives, in an act that confirmed the moral order and stature of the household itself. Among the warrior class in particular, vendetta was constructed, moreover, as a broader social duty, one recognized and expected by the avenger's status community of fellow samurai. A samurai who failed to avenge an elder member of his family would be counted by this community not only as derelict in his responsibilities to his household, but a moral failure as a samurai; conversely, the successful achievement of a vendetta would reaffirm the avenger's samurai status and increase his moral standing in the community. The act of vendetta and its consequences for the avenger's household and his standing in the community were, furthermore, closely connected to the ruling authority, which validated the vendetta at the legal level, often participating in the procedure of formally registering the vendetta with representatives of the shogunate, as I have discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>94</sup> A samurai retainer could expect a reward from his lord upon the successful completion of a vendetta, usually in the form of a raise in rank within the domain hierarchy and an increase in the rice stipend allotted to his household. A samurai's failure to pursue a vendetta would increase the likelihood of his losing his employment with the domain.<sup>95</sup> Conversely, success in a vendetta could bring an unemployed samurai to the attention of a lord, and thus could serve as a means back to a position

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<sup>94</sup> See the previous chapter for a discussion of the protocols of Edo period vendetta and the sources that reveal them. For examples of documents composed by local authorities on behalf of would-be avengers requesting official permission from the shogunate to pursue a vendetta, see Hiraide Kōjirō, *Katakiuchi* (Tokyo: Bunshōkaku, 1909, repr. in Chūkō bunko series, Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1990, 37-43). Page references are to the 1990 edition. Examples translated into English can be found in D. E. Mills, "Katakiuchi: The Practice of Blood-Revenge in Pre-Modern Japan," *Modern Asian Studies* 10, no. 4 (1976): 526-527.

<sup>95</sup> Many *fictional* vendetta narratives begin, in fact, with the lord temporarily making the samurai a *rōnin* (unemployed samurai), with reinstatement contingent upon his completion of the vendetta. In reality such a change in status was sometimes only partial; in many cases the domain agreed to continue paying the avenger's stipend to another member of his household while he sought revenge, and sometimes granted the avenger money to help pay for travel expenses. An example of both of these provisions can be seen in the official authorization documents for the commencement of a vendetta by two brothers and their uncle in 1828, quoted in Mills, "Katakiuchi," 526-527. The avenger could, moreover, expect this stipend to increase if the vendetta was a success.

of secure social being from a precarious and marginal one. While vendetta was the expected duty of a samurai, the social reaffirmation afforded by vendetta extended to members of other classes as well, particularly as acts of vendetta by non-samurai increased in the latter half of the Edo period.<sup>96</sup>

What is striking is that this reaffirmation was achieved through an act that temporarily cut the avenger loose from the protections guaranteed by these social relationships. The act of embarking on a vendetta constituted an indefinite break from the normal codes and strictures of everyday identity. An samurai avenger embarking on a vendetta became a *rōnin* (if he was not one already) until the completion of the vendetta. He was thus temporarily cut loose from his status community and from his position within his domain's authority structure. He would also be severed--in his pursuit of filial revenge on behalf of the familial dead--from his responsibilities and role within the living household.<sup>97</sup> In a world in which social identity was vividly presented upon the body and in clothing, the avenger frequently sought anonymity through identity-concealing disguise so as to be able to seek out the enemy without attracting

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<sup>96</sup> Successful avengers among the non-samurai classes could be included in the registers of filial children published by domains to advertise the moral status of their subjects and thus promote the moral validity of their own rule--another example of the reciprocal relations that obtained between individual and ruling authority. A section on commoner avengers is included as a supplement to the most famous of these registers, the monumental *Kankoku kōgiroku*, published by the shogunate itself in 1801. (I discuss this work in Chapter Four of the dissertation.) For a compelling discussion of the role of such registers, and *Kankoku kōgiroku* in particular, as well as the early modern phenomenon of celebrating filial children in general, see Niels Van Steenpaal, "Kinsei chūki ni okeru 'kōshi kenshō' no kenkyū: 'dōtoku bunka' shi no kōsō," (PhD diss., Kyōto University, 2012), esp. 18-25 and 93-134.

<sup>97</sup> In most cases of historical vendetta, only the designated avengers took to the road in pursuit of the enemy, leaving other members of the household behind. In the world of fiction, however, it is not uncommon, particularly in *gesaku* works of the later Edo period, for the family to set out together to seek revenge, a situation ripe for dramatic plot situations- mothers frequently fall ill, for example, limiting the mobility of the avenger and forcing difficult choices between the obligation to avenge the dead and to support the living. In these narratives the avengers are usually *rōnin* to begin with, and therefore lack the protection of a domain authority to provide for their household's income in their absence.

attention.<sup>98</sup> Whereas an early modern person's identity was also spatially closely bound to his fundamental social relationships, with travel a rare break from normal spatial limitations, the avenger was a figure of the road, afforded free and largely unrestricted access to the entire country through the formal registration of his vendetta with the shogunal authorities. While on the road, often wandering far from his household, his status community, and his domain, the avenger was very much on his own, granted--in the cause of obligation--a remarkable degree of personal freedom, but also severed from his network of social protection.<sup>99</sup> Only upon the successful completion of the vendetta could the avenger achieve reintegration into the relations that supported and affirmed his social being.

### **Avenger Time: Revenge as Chronotope**

The social implications of the practice of historical vendetta as discussed above translate well into a compelling narrative plot, which is the fundamental plot of early modern revenge fiction: one demarcated by a starting point (the circumstances of the initial killing and the

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<sup>98</sup> The Asada brothers, for example, who succeeded in slaying their father's killer in 1824 after a search of four years, disguised themselves as Shinto priests, Buddhist mendicants (*komusō*), and beggars during the search. See the extensive account given by Asada Tetsuzō to his home authorities upon completion of the vendetta, quoted in full in Hiraide, *Katakiuchi*, 192-199. The attire of the *komusō* was an almost stereotypical disguise for early modern avengers, and it appears frequently in the world of vendetta fiction as well. The *komusō* was a mendicant Buddhist priest who wore a large, basket-like sedge hat that concealed the face and who wandered the country playing the long shakuhachi flute and begging alms. The hat allowed the wearer to see out without his own face being observed, and because they were a mendicant sect, the sudden appearance of a priest in a town or village was not likely to arouse undue suspicion. Vendetta fiction also depicts avengers disguising themselves as pilgrims, who would not be amiss wandering the roads and could obtain money to support their search by begging alms, or as wandering peddlers, who could enter the inner quarters of households to display their wares and thus seek out information while preserving a degree of anonymity.

<sup>99</sup> In fact, the traveling avenger may have relied heavily on broader networks of family and acquaintances while pursuing revenge; the account provided by the Asada Tetsuzō after the completion of the Asada brothers' vendetta (see previous note) depicts the brothers as staying with relatives while scouring Edo, for example. However, the account also depicts the brothers as traveling through provinces and villages where they are treated as complete strangers, at times denied lodging and forced to sleep in the open because they have no recognizable social position within the communities they pass through. It became conventional in popular fiction to depict the avenger in this second, alienated situation; and when broader networks are appealed to in vendetta fiction, the conventional figure of recourse is the aged wet nurse--a figure with perhaps a nostalgic tie of affection to the avenger, but little standing within the broader communities most vital to the construction of Edo period personhood.

avenger's departure to seek revenge), and end point (the accomplishment of revenge and the subsequent reintegration into society). Between these points in Edo period revenge narratives stretches a unique period of crisis, transformation, and movement that I call *avenger time*, during which the avenger is loosed from certain social and geographic constraints, but must struggle nonetheless to retain and ultimately reaffirm a social identity that awaits him at the conclusion of his travails.<sup>100</sup> Avenger time opens the narrative possibilities of a revenge story out into the full width and breadth of the Japanese archipelago, including physical and social geographies and spaces (from distant mountains and shores to warrior residences and outcaste encampments) that most readers would never have occasion to visit firsthand; at the same time it constitutes a period of social crisis for the protagonist, in which he must not only endure numerous hardships, but must also be prepared to make difficult, unusual choices on his own, without the benefit of the protections afforded by his accustomed social life. Nor is he completely free: everything he does is directed to the cause of the vendetta. His social relations cannot offer him immediate protection, but they necessarily retain a claim on him if he hopes ever to achieve reintegration into their community. Far from a release into individual freedom, avenger time in these works marks a period when the social self becomes uncertain, endangered: much of the drama involves the question of how the individual will survive the ordeal in order successfully to reintegrate into

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<sup>100</sup> My thinking here has been influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope ("time-space"), which he uses to refer to "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature....In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history." This rather dense definition becomes clearer as Bakhtin explores specific examples of different chronotopes, such as the "adventure time" of the ancient Greek romance, illuminating the links that pertain between narrative time, space, plot, and genre. Ultimately, Bakhtin argues, the nature of the chronotope in a work of literature plays a large role in delineating the possibilities available in that work for the portrayal of a "living human being." Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84-258. The quotation is from p. 84.



its accustomed social world. Revenge fiction is thus a powerful narrative of early modern existential struggle.

At the same time, because of his unique and temporally delimited status, the avenger is powerful in ways that ordinary beings are not. His status as an avenger allows him to do things that would normally be forbidden, provided they are for the sake of the moral vendetta: not only can he hide his identity and travel widely, but he is permitted to kill. Within the context of avenger time, an act that would under other circumstances be treated as a crime is transformed into a socially valued, moral act. In this aspect of the literary figure of the avenger, we can perhaps see lingering valences of the elements that defined the avengers of revenge literature prior to the Edo period, as discussed in the previous chapter: elements of the disruptive, the unseen, and the liminal.

Konita Seiji, one of the few scholars to have attempted an all-encompassing theoretical approach to Edo period revenge fiction, points out that one of the elements that distinguishes early modern revenge fiction from the vendetta literature of other periods is its strong focus on the period between the initial killing and the achievement of revenge--in other words, what I have called avenger time.<sup>101</sup> Konita proposes a scheme of interlocked transformations that take place in this heart of a revenge narrative's plot: the movement of the avenger from childhood to

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<sup>101</sup> Konita Seiji, "Adauchi shōsetsu shiron," *Nihon bungaku* 38, no. 5 (1989): 77.

adulthood, from victimization to accomplishment, and from powerlessness to power.<sup>102</sup> I find elements of this schema rather too specific to apply to all early modern vendetta narratives, but I believe Konita's attention to the highly charged, transformative status of avenger time, and to the dynamic of powerlessness and power, is very apt. What his scheme does not articulate is the broader social dimension of this transformation, the way in which the avenger, cut loose from social protections, and empowered in atypical ways--but still answerable to social bonds--is forced to make decisions on his own that will ultimately impact on his social meaning.

These complicated dynamics of revenge fiction, which refract--through the unique and atypical social position of the avenger--the everyday relations that impact on the individual, have the effect of relativizing these social relationships, removing them from their habitual sites and revealing them in unaccustomed perspectives. Through the conflicts faced by the avenger on the road in these texts, and through the decisions he is depicted as making, which require him to choose among social obligations and thus to prioritize certain relationships and neglect others, these texts render the social anxieties and assumptions of early modern selfhood highly visible. They thus allow for the possibility of examining, reaffirming, questioning, or even critiquing these relationships and the demands they make on the individual. This possibility is present in all Edo period vendetta fiction. Nowhere, however, is it more visible than in narratives in which

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<sup>102</sup> Noting the felicitous endings of most Edo period vendetta narratives, which conclude with the reward of the avenger and his reintegration into society, Konita posits an overarching arc in vendetta narratives that he describes as "coming of age" (*seichō*), whereby the avenger begins the narrative still a child or a youth, but emerges a full-fledged adult, fully integrated into society. It is the vendetta itself which effects this transformation, through a parallel transformation from victimization (at the hands of the enemy who murders a member of the avenger's family) to accomplishment (successfully killing the enemy and taking revenge). A necessary element of the vendetta arc, however, is the arc of suffering and trial (the hardships faced while attempting to track down the enemy). The avenger begins this arc, Konita posits, in a condition of powerlessness, but upon obtaining some form of outside aid (for example a tip that identifies the enemy's hideout) the avenger moves to a position of power, which enables him to complete the attendant "vendetta" and "coming of age" arcs. See *ibid.*, 79-81. While Konita's schema is highly compelling and can indeed be said to apply to a large number of vendetta works, particularly from the latter half of the Edo period, it cannot be said to apply to all Edo vendetta narratives; the works of Ihara Saikaku, in particular, offer many exceptions.

revenge is in some way called into question, increasing the pressure on the protagonist to make a socially sound decision that will preserve his fragile being in the absence of his accustomed human relationships and the protections they afford.

### **Choosing an Identity: the Vendetta Fiction of Ihara Saikaku**

Perhaps the work of no author exemplifies the early modern focus on the unique social circumstances of “avenger time” and the capacity of revenge fiction to present compelling questions about the constitution of the individual self than that of Ihara Saikaku, the first great vendetta writer of the Edo period. Saikaku’s modern reputation is not as an author of vendetta tales; his canonical status rests primarily on his works devoted to love, the pleasure quarters, and the merchant class. Yet Saikaku published several major tale collections that focus explicitly on the samurai class, and depictions of warriors appear throughout his other works as well.<sup>103</sup>

Vendetta is highly prominent in Saikaku’s tales of samurai; his 1687 collection *Record of the Transmission of the Martial Way* (*Budō denraiki*), consisting of thirty-two tales (and discussed in the following chapter), is explicitly devoted to the theme of revenge. Adding to these the vendetta tales that appear across his other works, Saikaku’s total output of vendetta fiction rises to over forty tales.

Saikaku’s warrior works in general, including his vendetta fiction, have had a checkered modern reception, in large part because scholars have remained divided over the author’s

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<sup>103</sup> Saikaku’s works depicting the samurai class, collectively referred to in modern scholarship as his “warrior works” (*bukemono*), are *Record of the Transmission of the Martial Way* (*Budō denraiki*, 1687), *Tales of Samurai Duty* (*Buke giri monogatari*, 1688), and *The New Laughable Collection* (*Shin Kashōki*, 1688). In addition to these, the first half of the forty tales contained in *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (*Nanshoku ōkagami*, 1687) focus exclusively on male love affairs among members of the warrior class.

fundamental stance towards the samurai class.<sup>104</sup> The modern “discovery” of Saikaku in the Meiji period quickly became intertwined with an agenda of presenting Saikaku as Japan’s first “realist” author, but the elements that characterized this perceived realism--the closely observed details of daily merchant life and custom, intimate familiarity with the complex society of the pleasure quarters, a distant and drily ironic tone that checks any idealization of his subjects--are largely absent from his warrior tales. More significant than these specifics, however, is the general approach to human reality itself in these works, or to what Lionel Trilling refers to as “the question of reality...the old opposition between reality and appearance, between what really is and what merely seems.”<sup>105</sup> Underlying the many complexities of Saikaku’s works on love and the merchant class is a mode that draws its energy from the *gap* between appearance and reality, constantly, and often humorously, demonstrating the illusive nature of the former and replacing it

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<sup>104</sup> There remains a strong sense among Saikaku scholars that justice remains to be done to his warrior works, that they remain one of the next frontiers in Saikaku studies. In fact, there has been no dearth of scholarship on Saikaku’s warrior works, but the amount cannot compare to scholarship on his works on love and eroticism (*kōshokumono*) and the merchant class (*chōninmono*). Part of the challenge and excitement of rethinking Saikaku’s warrior works is that such an endeavor involves rethinking long-held ideas of what makes Saikaku a compelling author or a text a “successful” work. Recently, for example, *Shin Kashōki* (1688), the last of Saikaku’s warrior collections, has come to be reappraised as a work far more complex and compelling than scholars had previously understood. See Hirabayashi Kaori, “Shin Kashōki,” in Suwa Haruo, Hiroshima Susumu, and Someya Tomoyuki, eds., *Saikaku to ukiyo-zōshi kenkyū 4* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 2010): 242. (Donald Keene, echoing the prevailing judgment of Japanese scholarship at the time, in 1978 referred to *Shin Kashōki* as “leftovers from Saikaku’s bag.” See Keene, *World Within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era, 1600-1867* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), 201.) At the same time, however, a strong tendency in Saikaku scholarship of the past decade, particularly among younger scholars, has been a move to approach Saikaku’s works on a tale-by-tale basis; this has been particularly true of the warrior works. While such an approach reveals many of the complexities of Saikaku’s art on a small scale, it tends to avoid attempts to answer the bigger questions about Saikaku’s warrior works that have deviled modern scholarship; to my knowledge there remains, for example, no work that attempts to discuss Saikaku as a “vendetta” author across multiple works, as opposed to focusing on individual works or (at the largest) on his one collection explicitly devoted to vendetta. A noteworthy exception to the general trends described in this footnote is Someya Tomoyuki, *Saikaku shōsetsu ron: taishōteki kōzō to higashi Ajia e no shikai* (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 2005). Someya, in a move highly unusual in Saikaku scholarship, dramatically *widens* his scope to think about Saikaku’s works within a broader East Asian context that includes early modern Chinese and Korean literature. He also reads a number of Saikaku’s warrior works in a comparative framework against other of his works, although his primary focus throughout remains *The Great Mirror of Male Love*.

<sup>105</sup> Lionel Trilling, “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” in *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society* (New York: Viking Press, 1950; repr. New York: New York Review Books, 2008), 207. Citations refer to the New York Review Books edition.

with an unexpected version of the latter.<sup>106</sup> The twin milieus of the townsmen and the pleasure quarters that dominate these works are, significantly, worlds intimately connected with “the great generator of illusion” itself, money.<sup>107</sup> The characters in these works may make a show of being morally upright or socially responsible, but the pleasure of the narrative comes from discovering the ways they mask their hidden moral lapses, or the clever ways in which they negotiate among the many social obligations that lay claim to them to reach conclusions that maximize their personal benefit.

Saikaku’s samurai are a different matter. Rarely is any curtain pulled away in these tales to reveal a disingenuous or unexpected core. His warriors, instead, constantly affirm the reality of the ideology of their class, through performative--and often exaggerated--gestures of their commitment to obligation, to moral reputation, and to honor. These gestures may be extravagant, but the reader is never given any indication that they are insincere. This is a narrative mode that straddles a hazy border between valorization and burlesque, and it is therefore often difficult to discern whether the tales are intended to honor or to mock their samurai subjects, a question that has contributed to the problematic reception of these texts in the modern period. Yet if we treat these texts as approaching the same “question of reality” as the other works, but from a very different angle, one that is relevant within the context of the social relationships discussed above, it is possible to see them as possessing a compelling logic, and one that helps us to understand

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<sup>106</sup> To observe this mode at work, one need look no further than that great master of drag, the protagonist of *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (*Kōshoku ichidai onna*, 1686), who by camouflaging herself with the appearance and manners of a variety of different types of woman--court lady, daimyō’s concubine, priest’s kept woman, calligraphy teacher, seamstress, streetwalker--enters into a wide range of social worlds and reveals the masked realities hidden at the heart of each one. Another example is the patron of the pleasure quarters in the first book of *The Great Mirror of Various Beauties* (*Shoen ōkagami*, 1684) who treasures as his greatest possession an oath written out to him at his request by a courtesan, swearing never to love him, because it is the only thing to be found in the pleasure quarters that is *true*.

<sup>107</sup> Trilling, “Manners, Morals, and the Novel,” 209.

the appeal of fiction about warriors--particularly vendetta tales--throughout the Edo period in general.

One answer to the pressing contemporary question of how to conceive of the role of warriors in an age of peace--and in a political context that placed them at the apex of an ideological social hierarchy--was the idea that the warriors were to stand as moral exemplars for the rest of society. Farmers would grow crops, artisans would craft goods, but warriors would strive to perfect *themselves* and thus embody a moral standard for the rest of the populace to emulate.<sup>108</sup> This idea is developed in the work of seventeenth century philosophers such as Yamaga Sokō (1622-1685), but it also acquired a general, almost proverbial currency. It appears in Saikaku's warrior works as well; the narrator alludes to it in the opening line of *Transmission of the Martial Way*, Saikaku's vendetta collection, with the expression, "Warriors are a mirror for the people."<sup>109</sup> In this sense, we can read Saikaku's warrior tales as operating in a mode that takes the dynamics of social obligation and moral discourse that underlay all of Japanese early modern society, and, through the figure of the warrior--as a being who (in principle) must remain faithful to these obligations and moral claims without deferring or resorting to subterfuge--constructing narratives that deliberately throw them into conflict or push them to their extremes. In this process, the narratives provide a different approach to "reality," using the figure of the warrior to explore, *in extremis*, the implications of social dynamics and moral claims that bear upon all members of society. A courtesan may find a clever scheme to fulfill her obligations to two different patrons and keep them both happy, but a warrior faced with a conflict between his

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<sup>108</sup> See Nakamura Yukihiro, "Saikaku bungaku ni okeru buke," *Kokubungaku* 2, no. 6 (1957), 73.

<sup>109</sup> Ihara Saikaku, *Budō denraiki*, in Taniwaki Masachika, Fuji Akio, and Inoue Toshiyuki, eds., *Budō denraiki, Saikaku okimiyage, Yorozu no fumihōgu, Saikaku nagori no tomo*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai 77 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 7.

obligation to his lord and to his household must choose. Seeing what choice he makes would be of interest and relevance to readers regardless of their social class.

Revenge narratives present highly charged material for this type of narrative mode because, as argued above, they are deeply connected to the social relationships that bear upon early modern selfhood in general; they are grounded in the discourse of filial piety, a moral that pervaded all classes; and they can easily be made to push difficult choices between obligations and moral claims to their extremes, because in revenge narratives life and death always hang in the balance. In the figure of the avenger ruled by “avenger time,” a being bound by his obligations, but forced to make decisions of life and death in the absence of his accustomed social protections, readers could encounter a vision of the outer limits of social being as constructed by the multiple social forces that shaped their own lives.

To see this dynamic in action, we need look no further than Saikaku’s first published vendetta story, “The Karmic Escape Route” (*Inga no nukeana*), which appears in his 1685 story collection *Saikaku’s Tales from the Provinces* (*Saikaku shokoku banashi*). Saikaku’s third work of fiction, *Tales from the Provinces* is modeled on medieval anecdote anthologies (*setsuwa shū*), but the stories collected in its pages, set throughout the archipelago and featuring protagonists from all classes, depict a decidedly early modern world.<sup>110</sup> “I set out looking for material for stories,” the narrator states in the preface, which describes the many wonders encountered on his journeys, before concluding with the line: “Humans are real freaks, and there’s nothing that can’t

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<sup>110</sup> In this sense the work marks a significant departure from his previous works, *The Life of an Amorous Man* (*Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, 1682) and *The Great Mirror of Various Beauties* (*Shoen ōkagami*, 1684), both of which are set primarily in the pleasure quarters of the cities of Japan and are people almost entirely by merchants and courtesans. *Tales from the Provinces*, by contrast, has a much greater human and spatial geography, and includes not only townsmen, but aristocrats, farmers, warriors, and monks, not to mention supernatural beings such as tengu, tree spirits, and thunder gods.

be found in this world.”<sup>111</sup> *Saikaku's Tales from the Provinces* is, in other words, a work that seeks to render the workings of human society strange--stranger even than the world's many natural wonders (which include bamboos the width of buckets and fish that can swim in hot springs). It is within this narrative framework that Saikaku includes a story about warriors, and specifically about vendetta.

“The Karmic Escape Route” opens in Edo, where Ōkawa Han'emon is in service. Within its opening lines, sketched with Saikaku's usual narrative economy, we are quickly given a clear sense of Han'emon's position vis-a-vis the fundamental social relationships of household, community, and lord:

槍持・乗馬をひきつれて、家中にまたなき使者男、大河半右衛門が風俗、世に見ならへといわれしに、武士の身程定めがたき物はなし。きのふ古里豊後の国より、文遣はしけるを、女筆こゝろもとなく、明て見るに、兄婬が書こしける。  
「半兵衛殿事、此十七日の夜、妙福寺の碁会に、すこしの助言より、いひあがりて、寺田弥平次うつて、はや所をたちのき申候。子もなき人の御事なれば、おのゝさまならで、誰か外にはたよりもなし。女の身の是非もなき仕合」と、哀に申遣はしける。思案におよばず、俄に御暇申請、一子の判八ばかりつれて、武州を立出る。

Among the retainers of sufficient rank to go about accompanied by a spear-bearer and a change of mount, there was none to equal the courier samurai Ōkawa Han'emon in manner or appearance. “Learn from his example,” all the others were told. And yet there really is no existence as uncertain as a warrior's. The day before, a letter had come from his home in Bungo province. Uneasy at seeing that the writing was in a woman's hand, he quickly opened it and saw that it had been written by the wife of his older brother Hanbei. “On the night of the seventeenth, Hanbei went to participate in a *go* match at Myōfuku Temple. What began as a little friendly advice led to a flaring of tempers, and in the end Terada Yaheiji cut him down and took flight. Because Hanbei was childless, we have no one but you to rely upon for vengeance. As I am a woman, there is nothing I can do,”

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<sup>111</sup> *Hito wa bakemono, yo ni nai mono wa nashi*. Ihara Saikaku, *Saikaku shokoku banashi*, in Fuji Akio, Inoue Toshiyuki, Satake Akihiro, eds., *Kōshoku nidai otoko, Saikaku shokoku banashi, Honchō nijū fukō*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei 76 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1991), 264.



read her miserable letter. Without deliberation, Han'emon immediately requested leave and set out from Edo, taking only his son Hanpachi with him.<sup>112</sup>

Han'emon's household faces a crisis, a crisis that bears upon him in a unique way because of his specific position within that household. His older brother has been murdered. Because the hierarchical nature of familial revenge in the Edo period requires that junior family members avenge the deaths of senior family members, and because Hanbei had no son of his own, it is Han'emon's sole responsibility to avenge his older brother's death. This responsibility is relevant not only within the bounds of the household, but also within the samurai community in which he serves. This community looks up to Han'emon in particular as an exemplar of behavior and appearance ("Learn from his example"), and therefore he has an obligation to that community to set a good example by tracking down and killing his brother's murderer. He also has a similar obligation to the lord who grants him leave to pursue the proper, if dangerous, duty of a younger brother. These closely aligned social relations of family, community, and authority are, in this sense, close at hand even as Han'emon and his son depart Edo and enter into the alternate existence of avenger time.

The two track Yaheiji to Tajima province, where they discover that he has taken refuge in a heavily-fortified village house, surrounded by a double hedge and wall and guarded by rōnin and guard dogs. On a night of wind and rain the two cut a hole through the hedge and wall and attempt to approach the house, but they are discovered before they can reach Yaheiji and decide to make a strategic retreat:

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 339.

はじめのぬけ道に出るに、老人のふ自由さは、くぐり時隙入処を、跡より大勢両足にとりつき、すこしも身のうごきならず。判八立帰りて、親のくびを切、其くびさげて、にげのびけるに、跡にてせんぎさまざま ... 「盗人にはうたがひなし」と、其通りにすましける。

They made for the hole they had cut in the wall earlier, but because Han'emon was an older man he could not move as nimbly. While he was trying to get through the opening, a large number of the pursuers caught up and grabbed his legs from behind so that he could not move his body at all. Hanpachi stopped and ran back, cut off his father's head, and, carrying the head with him, made his escape. Afterwards the guards inspected the aftermath....They decided the two had been no more than thieves, and left it at that.<sup>113</sup>

With Hanpachi's stunning act, Saikaku plays with the moral ambiguities and ironies of 'avenger time.' Hanpachi's beheading of his trapped father preserves the anonymity of Han'emon (disguised as a thief), protecting his honor and preventing the guards from realizing that the avengers have discovered Yaheiji's hideout; thus Hanpachi will have a strategic advantage for making a second attack. Within the context of the vendetta, Hanpachi's action, although extreme, and highly ironic, makes a certain sense. In any other context, of course, a son beheading his father would run counter to the most fundamental laws of human order, and particularly against the filial ideology that undergirds the practice of vendetta itself. Already we can see in this story the potential of vendetta fiction to offer a unique perspective for reflection upon the values and social relations that govern identity and social being. In one deft move, Saikaku has dramatically relativized the value of filial piety, pushing it to its outer limits and thus opening to scrutiny the value that defines the proper relationship between fathers and sons. Is a son's first obligation to his father as a human being and to the preservation of his welfare? Or is he obligated to a more

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 340.

abstract value of filial piety, one which demands the performance of revenge on behalf of the household?<sup>114</sup>

The question of obligation and social identity becomes more pronounced as the tale draws to its conclusion, a conclusion that ultimately forces Hanpachi to make a fundamental choice about the nature of his own selfhood. After making his escape, the distraught Hanpachi flees to the mountains, determined to attack the compound again once night falls, both to complete the vendetta on behalf of his slain uncle, and to ensure that he has not taken his own father's life in vain. In the meantime, he prepares to bury his father's head. As Hanpachi digs into the earth, he comes across a buried skull. Surprised at this odd discovery, he buries both heads together and waits for nightfall.

塚を枕に、しばしまどろむうちに、彼しやれかうべ、つげて語るは、「我は[判兵衛]があさましき形也。我為とて、かたきを打に来て、汝が手にかゝる事は、是定る道理あり。前世にて、弥平次が一門、ゆへなき事に八人迄うしなひければ、天此科をゆるしたま[は]ぬを、今此身になりて覚る。其方とても、是をのがれがたし。武勇の本意をやめて、墨染の身となりて、先立し二人が跡を、よく／＼吊ふべし。此言葉の証拠には、我形あるまじ。二たびほつて見るべし」と、つげてうせける。

With the grave mound for his pillow he dozed off for a moment, and in a dream the skull he had just buried appeared to him and spoke. "I am the wretched shade of your uncle [Hanbei]. There is a predetermined reason why your father came here to strike down my enemy and instead died at your hand. In a previous existence I wiped out eight members of Yaheiji's family on the slightest pretense. Only now that I have been reduced to this form do I remember this sin that Heaven could not forgive. You too will find it hard to escape karma's plan. You must set aside your warrior's aim of revenge, don the dyed robes of a priest, and pray for the two who have preceded you in death. As proof of what

<sup>114</sup> In thinking about Saikaku's construction of Hanbei's predicament, we cannot ignore the *entertainment* value of extreme situations such as this one, as well as the irony that underlies them. I hope I will not be mistaken here as presenting an image of Saikaku as a stony-faced philosopher, humorlessly reflecting on the human condition. His fiction is clearly intended to entertain, which is part of why his characters find themselves in such extreme situations. The entertainment value of the story, however, by no means lessens its power as a site for reflection upon values and social relationships that pertain in quotidian life, even as it presents them *in extremis*.

I have said, my skull will no longer be where you buried it. Dig once again and look for yourself.” Having told him all this, the skull vanished.<sup>115</sup>

The pun of the story’s title “The Karmic Escape Route” now becomes clear: it was Han’emon’s karma to die at his son’s hand, trapped in the escape route, and the knowledge Hanbei imparts to Hanpachi gives him a chance to escape from this karmic fate that awaits him. With this twist of the plot, all of the fundamental social relations at play in early modern selfhood described thus far--household, community, and governing authority--become radically relativized by being situated within the larger, cosmic context of karma, which reaches beyond the bounds of this-worldly identity, continually reinventing and reorganizing the human relationships that take shape in the world. Karma is a mechanism of retribution that ensures that all offenses are in some way repaid; it stands in compelling contrast to vendetta’s regime of retribution, rooted in specific, hierarchical relations and this-worldly obligations. Again, a boundary is being tested: what can outweigh the web of relations and obligations in which an individual is entwined? Where do Hanpachi’s responsibilities lie, to the welfare of his family members’ suffering spirits, or to the public fulfillment of his obligations to the household? Can Hanpachi do what he alone knows is best for the spirits of his father and uncle, even if in the eyes of the world that constitutes a grave, unfilial transgression against them? If Hanpachi abandons revenge at this point, he will be less than human in the eyes of the world: a man who slew his own father and then fled to a monastery, abandoning revenge. He will have failed in his obligations to his household, his community, and his lord. Can he shoulder that worldly shame, knowing that it is the price of a much larger virtue?

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 341-342.

Significantly, he cannot. The conclusion of the story is presented with Saikaku's signature brevity:

彼塚をほるに、初めのしやれかうべなき事、不思議ながら、よもやうたで置べきかと、心をつくせし甲斐がなく、判八も又、かへり打にあいぬ。

When Hanpachi dug up the grave and saw that the skull was indeed no longer there, he thought it strange. But all the same he asked, "How could I stop without cutting him down?" and set out to obtain his goal. His efforts, however, were all in vain, and Hanpachi too ended up being cut down.<sup>116</sup>

The thought of abandoning this-worldly selfhood and its obligations seems not even to cross Hanpachi's mind. In medieval literature (which *Tales from the Provinces* frequently burlesques), the visitation of a ghost and the explication of karma would be an invitation to religious awakening (*hosshin*), tonsure, and withdrawal from society; here it is little more than a curious distraction from the task at hand, suggesting the power that this-worldly social obligations exert over the early modern individual. The reader, of course, can examine Hanpachi's decision and wonder what decision *he* might have made, or grin at Hanpachi's persistent resolve in the face of miraculous, otherworldly knowledge and affirm that, indeed, it would require tremendous effort to turn one's back on social expectations even under such circumstances. He can ask himself, to whom is Hanpachi--or anyone--most responsible?

Similar questions emerge, without supernatural elements, in Saikaku's *last* published work of vendetta fiction, "Hiding Out in Anryūchō" (*Anryūchō no kakurega*) included in his posthumous collection *Scraps of Miscellaneous Letters* (*Yorozu no fumihōgu*, 1696). The central conceit of this collection is unique in Saikaku's work, in that each of its seventeen stories takes the form of a letter, which Saikaku in the preface claims were found lining a rat's nest in a man's

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 342.

home during spring cleaning. These “letters” come from all across Japan and are written in the voices of people from all walks of life. In fact, each of them is written by Saikaku himself, but he presents himself as a mere compiler, appending a few lines of commentary purporting to be in his own voice to the end of each letter. One of the most striking of these letters is “Hiding Out in Anryūchō,” which is written in the voice of the older of two brothers who are in the midst of pursuing a vendetta against their father’s killer.

The older brother addresses the letter to an acquaintance and informs him of their progress. Because the intended recipient knows the origins of the vendetta, and because the letter ends with the vendetta still unfulfilled, the usual endpoints marking the beginning and ending of a vendetta are rendered obscure here; indeed, the entire letter takes place within the context of avenger time. The first lines of the letter establish the *mise-en-scene* of the avenger’s life on the road far from home, and they remind us of the unique social status of the avenger, temporarily loosed from the spatial and social rootedness of everyday life. We learn that the brothers are renting a small room in Sumiyoshi, south of Osaka, which they present as a secondhand goods store so as not to arouse suspicion or attention from the local community and authorities. Originally they had disguised themselves as fish peddlers and set off daily for Osaka, searching district after district as they sold their fish, but having no luck, and anxious to preserve their anonymity, they have since changed their appearance to that of medicine sellers, wearing deep hats that hide their faces. They tell no one that they are brothers, do not reveal their family name, and have taken pseudonyms: Dengorō and Denkurō, which are the only names by which we know them in the story. Yet even on the road, they are still intimately concerned with the ways they are perceived by their home community, as we shall see.

One day, the older brother informs us, his younger brother Denkurō spots a suspicious palanquin, guarded by several men and traveling with its side flaps down despite the good weather. Catching a glimpse inside, he is convinced that the passenger is none other than their enemy, Okuzeki Tohei. He trails the palanquin to a roadside tea stall, where the passenger gets out and is just about to enter the garden of a nearby house. Denkurō seizes the chance:

木陰よりはしり出、「横井尉左衛門が悴子、見わすれたるか。奥関戸平、のがれぬ所」と、打てかゝり申候時、此侍ひ飛しさり、「やれまで、人たがひ」と手をあげられしに、伝九郎なを進みて切入、けはしく成時、溝川飛越、大小をぬき捨、無刀になつて、下人どものいさむをしづめ、「それがしは岩塚団之丞とて、生国越前の者成が、大かた様子も見られよ。疝気に筋骨いたみ、主人にお暇申、熊野へ湯治いたすの所に、是は存知もよらぬ難義。此方は大勢なれば、せんぎの仕やうもあれど、若年の敵うつべき心掛、はやつて我を見違へらるゝの段、すこしも意恨にぞんぜぬ」と...

He leapt out from the shadow of the trees, and shouting, “Do you recognize the son of Yokoi Jōzaemon? Okuzeki Tohei, you have nowhere to escape!” he began to strike at him, but the samurai leapt away, threw his hands in the air, and said, “Wait a minute, you have the wrong man!” Denkurō advanced and prepared to strike again, but at the moment of danger the man leapt across a ditch, removed and threw down his long and short swords, quieted his retainers, and said, “My name is Iwatsuka Dannojo. I am a native of Echizen. You can see what I look like. I have been suffering from colic, and I received permission from my lord to go to take the waters in Kumano for treatment. I did not expect something like this to happen! I have a lot of men with me, and it would be easy for us to capture you and bring you before the authorities. But since I am impressed by your determination to kill your enemy, young as you are, and since you mistook me for him, I won’t hold it against you at all.”<sup>117</sup>

This situation is very complicated for young Denkurō, because he confronts it entirely alone, and the decision he makes will affect his entire being. As an avenger, he has the right to kill a man, but it must be the right man. If he kills an innocent man by mistake, he will be unprotected by his

<sup>117</sup> Ihara Saikaku, *Yorozu no fumihōgu*, in Taniwaki Masachika, Fuji Akio, Inoue Toshiyuki, eds., *Budō denraiiki, Saikaku okimiyage, Yorozu no fumihōgu, Saikaku nagori no tomo*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai 77 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 396.

unique status as a filial avenger; he will instead be a common murderer in the eyes of the authorities. If, on the other hand, he willingly lets his father's killer escape, he will not only have failed in his filial duty to his household but will have earned a reputation for cowardice among his community of fellow samurai. The decision he has to make about the man before him is therefore a decision that will have dramatic consequences for his own self vis-a-vis his most fundamental social relationships. Complicating matters is the fact that, although he once saw Ozeki Tohei in person, he was still a child at the time and cannot trust his memory enough to be certain that he has the right man. The decision is one he must make, without any protections, completely alone.

Ultimately persuaded by the man's argument and his behavior, Denkurō decides to let the man go. They part on very good terms, with the man wishing him the best in his vendetta and inviting him to visit his home if he ever finds himself in Echizen. When Denkurō returns to his dwelling and informs his older brother what happened, however, the older brother is convinced that the man was indeed their enemy Tohei. Denkurō is devastated, and he utters a telling statement. "Even if I had the wrong person, what a coward I was not to cut him down!" he cries, red faced. "It would not have mattered even if it cost me my life!"<sup>118</sup> In other words, faced with the possibility that he has let his enemy slip through his fingers, Denkurō immediately reassesses and reorganizes his priorities. His new value judgment places his reputation in the eyes of his community and his filial obligations as an avenger above adherence to the rule of law, in the process negating the value of his own life (and that of the man, guilty or innocent). Devastated and humiliated, he then absconds, no doubt to attempt to catch up to Tohei before he can make a

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 398.



clean escape, an act that ironically has a negative impact on the vendetta. “Searching together with one heart as brothers,” his older brother writes, “I felt we could part the clouds, split the earth, and search the entire world in order to perform our filial duty to our father. Having parted from Denkurō, things now look hopeless.” Even the solidarity of the brothers, united in their pursuit of filial duty, has been damaged by Denkurō’s actions.

The letter ends where it began, *in medias res*, and we never learn whether the brothers succeed in finding their enemy, or whether the man Denkurō let go was indeed Tohei. The reader is thus invited to put himself in Denkurō’s place, and to face the choice Denkurō has to make, with uncertainty equal to that of Denkurō himself. The text invites the reader to prioritize the values that bear upon Denkurō’s being and that ultimately have relevance to his own. What is most important: one’s reputation? one’s filial obligation? one’s adherence to the laws that order society? one’s life? The epistolary form of the story, by keeping the real identity of the man and the conclusion of the vendetta secret, ensures that--just as Denkurō must make his decision uniquely *alone*--the reader is offered no protections or guarantees as he reflects upon the order of social relations and obligations that, in less dramatic fashion, make their claims upon his own being.

### **Vendetta and Social Critique: Ueda Akinari’s “Suteishimaru”**

In my discussion of Ihara Saikaku’s vendetta fiction, I have tried to show the ways in which the vendetta topos can be a powerful site for reflection upon the fundamental human relations at play in the construction of early modern selfhood, and I have suggested that such potential may explain in part the persistent popularity of vendetta narratives throughout the Edo

period. “Reflection” perhaps suggests a value neutral process, and I do not mean to suggest that vendetta fiction, by placing the demands of these multiple relations in conflict with one another, necessarily aimed at their critique or transformation; much vendetta fiction, indeed, may be said to reaffirm these relations by forcing them into situations wherein they must be prioritized, established in a functional hierarchy. Nonetheless, vendetta fiction, which draws attention to these relations, and which also shows alternative possibilities to them through the depiction of “avenger time,” does carry a potential for critique; by revealing these relationships in a different light, it raises the possibility of thinking about ways in which they can be transformed, or imbues them with new meanings. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, this critical potential of vendetta fiction is at work in many different kinds of texts and in many different ways, some more subtle than others. Here I would like to present a striking and sophisticated example of the power of vendetta fiction to offer a critique of the individual’s relationship to the social forces that impact on his identity, through an examination of Ueda Akinari’s tale “Suteishimaru,” from his collection *Tales of the Spring Rain* (*Harusame monogatari*, ca. 1805-1808?). The story is particularly relevant to our discussion here, because, through a remarkable accident of history, it is based in precisely the same legends from which Kikuchi Kan received the inspiration for “Beyond Love and Hatred,” discussed at the opening of this chapter, although Kikuchi was completely unaware of it when he wrote his own story.

*Tales of the Spring Rain* was never published--and may not have been completed--in Akinari’s lifetime, and it is questionable whether he intended for it ever to be published at all. Unlike his earlier story collection *Tales of the Moon and Rain* (*Ugetsu monogatari*, 1776), which was heavily influenced by Chinese fiction and the contemporary narrative practice of adapting

Chinese sources to Japanese settings, the material in *Tales of the Spring Rain* is largely based on Japanese legends and sources, and it reflects Akinari's concern with nativist studies (*kokugaku*), poetics, and history in his late years. The stories in the collection come to us in multiple versions, from different manuscripts, some in Akinari's hand and some in others', and a number of the stories show considerable variation; others remain fragmentary and can be understood only by stitching together different versions.<sup>119</sup> Of the collection's ten tales, half remained undiscovered until after the conclusion of the Second World War. "Suteishimaru" is one of these stories. Kikuchi Kan's story was published in 1919, and so he had no way of knowing that he was crafting a narrative similar to that written by Akinari over one century earlier. Both works are inspired by the historical opening of the tunnel known as Ao no dōmon in Kyūshū in the early eighteenth century by the monk Zenkai, who took thirty years to complete the project. Little is known about the historical Zenkai, but at some point the idea that he was a murderer fleeing a vendetta became incorporated into his legend, and this element appears to have inspired both Kikuchi and Akinari, though in different ways, as we shall see.<sup>120</sup>

The story opens in northern Honshū, at "the far end of the eastern lands," where an extremely wealthy man called the "rich man of Oda" or simply "Oda" has "left his treasures and everything to the care of his son Kodenji, and spends day and night enjoying himself with

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<sup>119</sup> The most complete version, containing versions of all ten of the stories now considered to comprise *Tales of the Spring Rain*, is a manuscript not in Akinari's hand dated Bunka 5 (1808). This version was discovered around the year 1950. Prior to that, the best known version was a manuscript in Akinari's hand containing only five stories and known as the Tomioka variant, of which the Bunka 5 version is thought to be a later revision. The Tomioka variant was published in the modern period prior the discovery of the Bunka 5 variant, and for many years it was considered the standard version of *Tales of the Spring Rain*. Numerous additional drafts and fragments exist as well, but most appear to date from the first decade of the 19th century; the collection thus appears to have remained largely unknown until the modern period.

<sup>120</sup> For a detailed account of the history of the Zenkai legend, the sources that reveal it, and the sources upon which Akinari may have relied in crafting "Suteishimaru," see Asano Sanpei, "'Suteishimaru' no hōhō," *Ueda Akinari no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1985), esp. 606-619. Asano also investigates the question of when the revenge narrative may have entered the Zenkai legend, and he considers the sources upon which Kikuchi Kan may have relied for his version of the story.

drink.”<sup>121</sup> His favorite drinking companion is an enormous man, “over six feet tall, heavyset and fat” called Suteishimaru, literally “abandoned stone,” because when drunk he drops off into a dead sleep right in the midst of the fields or mountains. Suteishimaru is a striking figure, a man of extraordinary strength and little culture, but not a brute; physically and in his behavior he does not fit in with society, which seems to be part of his appeal to the eccentric rich man. During one of their drinking sessions, the old man gives Suteishimaru a sword, a family heirloom passed down over five generations, to protect himself with against wild beasts when he drops off to sleep in the fields. Later that night, worried that the heavily intoxicated Suteishimaru will lose the sword, the equally drunk Oda attempts to take it back from him, and a goodhearted, largely incoherent tussle ensues, during which Suteishimaru accidentally cuts his own arm, bathing himself and Oda in blood. Kodenji, trying to protect his father, also ends up covered in Suteishimaru’s blood. At this point, two servants emerge from Oda’s mansion:

「これや、御二人を殺すよ」とて、前うしろにとりつく。さてはあやまりつと思ひて、二人の男を左右の腋にかいはさみ、「主ごろしはせぬぞ」とて逃げ行く。二人のをとこら、とらはれながら、「主ごろしよ」とて、おらひ云ふ。さては、父子ともに我あやまちしよとて、二人の男を深き流れに打ちこみて逃げゆく。父はまだ酒さめざれば、血にまみれながら、つるぎの身ささげて、をどり拍子にかへる。

‘What is this! He’s murdering both of them!’ they cried, and grabbed [Suteishimaru] from front and behind. Thinking he might have made a mistake, Suteishimaru pinned each of them under his arms, cried, ‘I haven’t murdered my master!’ and began to flee. The two men, trapped as they were, yelled, ‘Murderer!’ Suteishimaru began to think that he really had killed the man and his son, so he threw the two servants into a deep river and fled.

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<sup>121</sup> Ueda Akinari, *Harusame monogatari*, in Nakamura Yukihiro, Takada Mamoru, Nakamura Hiroyasu, eds., *Hanabusa sōshi, Nishiyama monogatari, Ugetsu monogatari, Harusame monogatari*. Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 78 (Tokyo: Shōgakusan, 1995), 487.

[Kodenji's] father had still not sobered up. Covered in blood, he held the sword, swinging it to keep time as he danced his way home.<sup>122</sup>

Kodenji calms the household and puts his father to bed, but the next morning it is discovered that the old man has died in his sleep. A doctor is called, and he confirms that the rich man's death was completely natural and had no connection to the events of the night before, but the rumor spreads through the household: "Suteishi really did kill the master!" Word soon reaches the local lord, who has long coveted Oda's great wealth. Ordering an investigation and bribing the doctor, he declares the death a murder, ignoring Kodenji's account of the events. Instead, the lord accuses him:

「目の前に親をうたせながら、いつはる事いかに。国の刑に行はんものを。見ゆるすべし。親のかたきの首提げてかへらずば、領したる野山、家の財のこりなく召し上げて、追ひやらふべし。ゆけ、とく」とて入りぬ。打ちわびつつかへりて、姉に申す、「病こそやまね、骨ほそく、刀こそさせ、人うつすべ知らず。丸めは力量の者なり。あはば必ずさいなまれん」と云ふ。

'Your father was cut down right before your eyes, and you think you can lie to us about it? You should be punished according to the law of the land, but we will overlook it for now. However, if you do not bring back the head of your father's killer, we will confiscate your fields and mountains and all the riches of your household, leaving nothing behind, and banish you. Go, quickly!' So saying, the lord withdrew. Sunk in gloomy thoughts, Kodenji returned home, where he said to his sister, 'I have never been ill, but I am small and delicate, and although I wear a sword, I know nothing about how to kill a man. [Suteishi]maru is a man of great strength. If I find him, he will destroy me.'<sup>123</sup>

With these events, Akinari has crafted a remarkable vendetta tale, one in which the avenger knows that there is no real murder to avenge but is compelled by forces beyond his control to embark upon a vendetta nonetheless. These forces beyond his control are, needless to say, the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 490.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 492-493.

three primary social relationships I have discussed. Kodenji's community is convinced that his father was murdered; in their eyes, it will be a severe moral failure on his part if he does not seek revenge. The ruling authority, coveting the wealth of Kodenji's family, has confirmed this false version of events with the full weight of its power. It has done so, moreover, by putting in jeopardy the continued existence of Kodenji's household, the community to which he, as heir, is most immediately responsible.<sup>124</sup> This is a very pessimistic portrayal of the individual's relationship to the social communities that define him, a portrayal in which the beliefs, desires, and demands of these social forces, corrupt or misguided though they may be, have the capacity to alter the very reality of the hapless individual. Here they call into existence a murder that never happened, and they transform Kodenji, in spite of the reality that he personally knows to be true, into an avenger.

For Akinari, critique, rooted in the individual's experience of society's contradictions, lay at the heart of the practice of writing fiction (*monogatari*). Akinari's clearest statement of his views on fiction occurs in the *Blackberry Book* (*Nubatama no maki*), thought to have been composed after 1790, and containing views that are seen as informing Akinari's composition of *Tales of the Spring Rain*.<sup>125</sup> The work takes the form of a dream dialogue between the poet Hitomaro and Sōchin, a man so obsessed with the *Tale of Genji* that he has copied it out twenty-four times. In response to Sōchin's argument that the value of the *Tale of Genji* lies in its moral lessons (as argued by its Confucian and Buddhist commentators), or in its depictions of reality or

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<sup>124</sup> The characters of Kodenji's name themselves suggest his status as successor, as well as his small size; his very name thus contains within it the weight of his responsibility towards his household, and the physical weakness that is his greatest source of anxiety regarding his ability to bear that responsibility by slaying Suteishimaru.

<sup>125</sup> Nakamura Hiroyasu, "Akinari no bungaku ron," *Nihon bungaku* 13, no. 2 (1964): 2. See also Iikura Yōichi, "Akinari ni okeru 'ikidōri' no mondai: *Harusame monogatari* e no ichi shiten," *Bungaku* 52, no. 5 (1984): 73.

truth excluded from works of history (as argued for fiction by Genji himself in the *Tale*),

Hitomaro utters the statement that is seen as lying at the heart of Akinari's theory of fiction:

そも物がたりとは何ばかりの物とか思ふ。もろこしのかしこにもかゝるたぐひは。ひたすらそらごとをもてつとめとし。専ら其实なしといへども。必よ。作者のおもひよするところ。或は世のさまのあだめくを悲しび。或は国のついえをなげくも。時のいきほひのおすべからぬを思ひ。くらゐ高き人の悪みをおそれて。いにしへの事にとりなし。今のうつゝを打かすめつゝ。おぼろげに書出たる物なりけり。

What exactly do you think *monogatari* is? In China they refer to such things as a matter of working with empty words [*soragoto*, glossed by Akinari with the characters *gūgen*, allegory]. Yet although it is completely lacking in truth (*jitsunashi*), it is based in the thoughts of the author--whether grieving over the capriciousness of the world, or lamenting the decline of the state. But thinking of the impossibility of changing the times, and fearing the wrath of those of high rank, he sets his material in the past and only hints at the reality of the present, writing about it in a hazy way.<sup>126</sup>

Fiction, as expressed here, is not a matter of expressing an objective truth, but of expressing an author's subjective, critical thoughts (his griefs and laments) about the world in which he lives, in an indirect or obscured way.<sup>127</sup> It is rooted in negative emotions, and it is ultimately an expression of rage at the contradictions of present society (as contrasted with ancient society, in which, Akinari argues, it had been possible for people to express their feelings with pure, unmediated immediacy in poetry):

さて国栄え。人の心花にのみうつりゆきては。事はたくみに。詞はあやに。かれにまつはされ。是にねぢけつゝ。あふさきるさに事立て。書は憤りより書もするものにいふよ。

<sup>126</sup> Ueda Akinari, *Nubatama no maki*, in Ueda Akinari zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., *Ueda Akinari zenshū*, vol. 5 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1992), 63.

<sup>127</sup> My reading of this passage, and of *Nubatama no maki* in general, is indebted to the exegesis of Tanaka Toshikazu in "Akinari no bungei kan," *Ueda Akinari bungei no sekai* (Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1979), 7-18.

When the realm flourishes and people's hearts run only to extravagance, things are done with skill and words are used with technique, bound this way and twisted that way, and everything is done on conflicting bases; then writing emerges from rage.<sup>128</sup>

This rage that gives birth to fiction is an intensely personal emotion directed at society, but it is also contained and deflected by an awareness of the individual author's position within society. Unlike the ancients who expressed themselves in poetry without struggle or restraint, the author, although keenly aware of and motivated by personal feelings, must alter the expression of those feelings out of deference to "those of high rank" whose existence bears on his own being and his ability to express himself.<sup>129</sup> The position of the author in Akinari's view of fiction is not unlike that of Kodenji himself, caught between the reality he knows to be true and the reality shaped by social forces beyond his control. Significantly, it is through the figure of Kodenji that Akinari presents not only his social critique, but an alternative possibility for the individual's relationship to society.

This possibility emerges in the tale within the framework of avenger time, that moment of danger, transformation, and power for the avenger, as a figure answerable to social relations but no longer protected by them and uniquely alone. At his sister's urging, Kodenji goes to study swordsmanship with a shrine priest skilled in the martial arts, who reassures him, saying, "Strength has its limits. It is in the employment of skill that one achieves free mastery (*waza wa hodokosu ni henka jizai nari*)."<sup>130</sup> Kodenji trains wholeheartedly for one year, at which point his

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<sup>128</sup> Akinari, *Nubatama no maki*, 66-67.

<sup>129</sup> Nakamura Hiroyasu explicitly links Akinari's "rage" to a sense of "self-consciousness" (*jiishiki*) in conflict with an equally strong sense of societal place or social delimitation (*'bundo' no ishiki*). Nakamura, "Akinari no monogatari ron," 13. For discussions of *Nubatama no maki* in English, see Susan Burns, *Before the Nation: Kokugaku and the Imagining of Community in Early Modern Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), esp. 123-126, and Dennis Washburn, *Translating Mt. Fuji: Modern Japanese Fiction and the Ethics of Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), esp. 35-37.

<sup>130</sup> Akinari, "Suteishimaru," 493.



master announces that he is ready. “The authorities allow one to bring support [on a vendetta],” he says, “but that is not the way of a real man (*masurao*). Go alone. If you meet your enemy, you will without question return with his head.” Kodenji’s fears and concerns have fallen away: “harboring in his heart none of the doubts he had at the beginning, he set out lightly for the east.”<sup>131</sup> He has begun a remarkable transformation.

This transformation reaches its climax when he succeeds in locating Suteishimaru. Like Ryōkai in Kikuchi Kan’s story, Suteishimaru has found his way to Kyūshū, where he has devoted himself to carving out a tunnel to provide a safe detour for travelers around a dangerous river gorge. Unlike Ryōkai in Kikuchi’s story, who is a real murderer, Suteishimaru is innocent. Like Kodenji, however, his being is defined not by his own experience, but by social forces beyond his control. “I did not kill my master,” he says, “but because I have achieved a name for having done so, I am a great criminal.”<sup>132</sup> So conscious is he of the power of the community’s perception to define him that he is prepared to seek out Kodenji and surrender himself so that Kodenji may take his revenge. Years of heavy drinking, however, have rendered him half-paralyzed, and he has no way of seeking out Kodenji. Instead, he sets about the task of digging the tunnel, using the tremendous strength that remains in his arms to carry out a project of atonement for the crime he never committed.

When Kodenji finally locates him, both men remain aware that they are playing parts in a social drama not of their own making. “You, the son of the dead man, are aware that I did not kill my master,” Suteishimaru says to Kodenji. “But now that such word has spread, there is no use making excuses. Cut off my head and return home.” Kodenji, however, is greatly impressed by

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 495.

the herculean feat Suteishimaru has been performing on behalf of his dead father, and it is here that his own transformation into a truly powerful being becomes complete. In reply to Suteishimaru's willingness to sacrifice his own life to fulfill the role that society has created for him, Kodenji makes a remarkable decision: he chooses to reject the social forces and obligations that have brought him to this point:

首とらんとて来しかど、此の行路難を開きて、長き代にたよりする、御父の手むけとぞ。いで、我も力そへん。家は亡ぶともいかにせん。始ある物、必ずよ終ある、時なるべし。姉は仏の弟子にておはせば、よく思しとりて、心しづかに行ひたまはん。我力をそへて後に、あねの所にいきて、す行すべし。

I came here to take your head, but I find you opening up this treacherous passage, an act that will benefit generations to come, and that serves as an offering to my father's spirit. Here, let me lend you my strength. If my household is extinguished, that cannot be helped. Everything that has a beginning must have an end. That is the working of time. My sister is a servant of the Buddha. She will surely understand and will [live out her life] quietly performing her devotions. After helping you, I will go to her and join her in her practices.<sup>133</sup>

Kodenji then helps Suteishimaru to complete the tunnel.

"If my household is extinguished, that cannot be helped." It should be clear by now that these are remarkably unusual words for an early modern man--an heir, no less--to utter.<sup>134</sup> That they are the words of a tremendously powerful man becomes clear soon thereafter, when Suteishimaru jokingly comments to Kodenji that, had it come to fighting, Kodenji would have been no match for him, even in his half-paralyzed state. Kodenji does not answer but silently

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 495-496.

<sup>134</sup> Katō Hirokazu reads this aspect of "Suteishimaru" in terms of Akinari's own personal experiences as an adopted heir. When the family business was destroyed in a fire after the death of his foster parents, Akinari chose not to rebuild it. He had already harbored conflicted feelings about holding the position of heir instead of his foster sister, who was the biological daughter of his foster parents. See Katō Hirokazu, "'Suteishimaru' o yomu: Suteishimaru, Kodenji, soshite Akinari," in *Ueda Akinari no shisō to bungaku* (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 2009), 206-229, esp. 222-227.

approaches a stone so large “it would take twenty men to lift it” and kicks it into the air, “as though the stone were a kickball.” He then draws an arrow and shoots down two geese from the distant sky. “You are proud of your strength,” he tells Suteishimaru, “but it has its limits. My arts can produce boundless transformations. If you tried to face off against me, I could subdue you as easily as I would a child.”<sup>135</sup>

In Suteishimaru and Kodenji, Akinari thus presents two visions of power. Suteishimaru, for all his monstrous strength, remains to the end subject to the power of social perception; although he believes he can easily defeat Kodenji, he is reconciled to the idea that he must play the role of criminal that social misunderstanding has constructed for him and sacrifice his life to the false vendetta. Kodenji, however, ultimately rejects the identity that society has forced upon him and instead remains faithful to the reality that he knows to be true, in which Suteishimaru is innocent and undeserving of death. He elects to remain true to himself, even if it means neglecting his obligations and sacrificing a place in the social world--and in this choice he is shown to possess superhuman power. Moreover, his powerful choice has the effect of altering his social reality, bringing it into line with his personal reality. The local lord in Kyūshū is so impressed by the feat performed by Kodenji and Suteishimaru in constructing the tunnel that he intervenes with the lord of Kodenji's province. Kodenji returns home without facing punishment; instead, his household flourishes. The tale ends on a highly felicitous note, with Kodenji donating riches to repair the shrine where he undertook the training that began his transformation, which in turn flourishes and becomes one of the most respected shrines in eastern Japan.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Akinari, “Suteishimaru,” 497.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 498.

Akinari's vendetta tale "Suteishimaru" thus employs the site of vendetta not only as an opening to reflection upon the relations that obtain between the self and the social forces that shape it, but it proposes an alternative model of those relations, one that affirms the agency of the individual and the power he has to shape, at least in part, his social reality. "Avenger time," the moment when the individual is severed from society's protections and must go forth into danger, as Kodenji's master emphasizes, alone, is made in Akinari's narrative into an opportunity for the self to discover its own power and assert some control over its own identity. At the same time, it should be clear that the alternative relationship between self and society proposed in this story is deeply connected to the social world of early modern Japan, and does not represent a radical break with it. Kodenji's actions are morally sound by early modern standards, and at the end of the story he is reintegrated into the key relationships with his household, his community, and even the corrupt authorities who sent him on the false vendetta, and who remain in power at the story's end. "Suteishimaru" is strikingly different from Kikuchi Kan's modern version of the same basic narrative. In Kikuchi's version, the social relationships--with household, community, and ruler--that are so vividly present and pressing in Akinari's version are all rendered abstract, present only in passing snatches of backstory narration. More significantly, in Kikuchi's story one individual willingly forgives another individual who has committed a crime; in Akinari's version, the avenger makes the decision, in the face of tremendous social pressure, not to kill an innocent man. It is highly significant that in Akinari's story Suteishimaru is not really the murderer of Kodenji's father. A son willfully forgiving his father's killer would represent a radical break with fundamental values at the heart of early modern Japanese social ideology; what Akinari's tale proposes is an alternative model of values within a preexisting framework, an

idealized vision in which self and society are in balance: the self is not at the mercy of society, but neither does it forgo or reject its social obligations when those obligations are valid. Kodenji is powerful, but he is powerful within the webs of social meaning that defined the person of early modern Japan.

### **Restraint, Indulgence, and Poetic Justice: Contrasting Modes of Revenge in Santō Kyōden**

What would it mean to break fully with these social bonds, to abandon one's social obligations, and to give in to personal indulgence beyond the bounds of the socially sanctioned? That is one of the fundamental questions underlying Santō Kyōden's *yomihon* of 1803 *Revenge and Wonders: The Pond of Asaka* (*Fukushū kidan: Asaka no numa*), a tale that contrasts two very different kinds of vengeance. One of Kyōden's earliest *yomihon*, *The Pond of Asaka*, a lengthy five volume work, sold well by the standards of its day, and it established elements of language and structure that became standard in *yomihon* of the late Edo period, which were characterized by lengthy, highly convoluted plots, narrative influences from Chinese vernacular fiction, historical settings, and elements of the supernatural.<sup>137</sup> Yet while acknowledged today as an important and canonical work of the genre, *The Pond of Asaka* has been criticized in the modern period for employing a piecemeal, poorly unified structure, in large part because it is constructed of two plot lines that touch upon each other only tangentially: one the story of an avenger, the

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<sup>137</sup> Kyokutei Bakin noted of *The Pond of Asaka* that "because it met with the favor of the time, it sold as many as several hundred copies." By the standards of the day, this was a success, particularly for such a lengthy, and therefore undoubtedly pricey, work. Many readers would likely have encountered *The Pond of Asaka* not through possession of a personal copy, but through the services of a book lender (*kashihon'ya*). See Bakin, *Kinsei mono no hon Edo sakusha burui*, ed. by Kimura Miyogo (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 1988), 147. The popularity of *The Pond of Asaka* during the Edo period is suggested by its theatrical legacy as well: stage adaptations were penned by Tsuruya Nanboku and Kawatake Mokuami, two of the greatest playwrights of the late Edo period. Kyōden also authored a sequel to the work in the genre of *gōkan*, titled *The Pond of Asaka: A Later Vendetta* (*Asaka no numa gonichi no adauchi*). For the influence of *The Pond of Asaka* on the language and style of late *yomihon*, see Ōtaka Yōji, "'Haishimono' yomihon no buntai to *Asaka no numa*," in *Kyōden to Bakin: 'Haishimono' yomihon yōshiki no keisei* (Tokyo: Kanrin shobō, 2010), 81-113.

other the story of a ghost.<sup>138</sup> If, however, we evaluate the relationship between these plot lines not in terms of direct interactions between characters or links between events, but instead thematically, as presenting two contrasting visions of vengeance, it becomes possible to read *The Pond of Asaka* as powerfully questioning the respective appeal and justice of a socially sanctioned, moral mode of revenge versus a socially and morally defunct, self-indulgent version of revenge.

The protagonists of these mirror plots, Yamanoi Hamon and Kohada Koheiji, are both victims of hideous crimes, but each in a strikingly different way. It is in the paths they take to seek revenge for those crimes that the juxtaposition between two models of vengeance--and of justice--takes shape. I will begin by discussing Hamon, the brilliant, talented, and handsome son of a once-illustrious samurai family. The family has fallen on hard times and now barely ekes out an existence in the province of Awa, where Hamon's father teaches reading and writing to local children and his mother gathers seaweed to get by.<sup>139</sup> This is a household that has fallen far outside the realm of social support that proper employment to a lord would afford, and its members live a socially peripheral and precarious existence, entirely unprotected by any social network should a crisis arise. Hamon's characterization is intimately linked to his household's uncertain fate and to the desire of his parents to secure for it a position more firmly integrated into society. They have put their faith in Hamon's natural talents, and they pray for the day when

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<sup>138</sup> The editors of the *Santō Kyōden zenshū* summarize the "standard reputation" of the work: "From the perspective of structure, the main plot concerning Yamanoi Hamon's vendetta, and the subsidiary plot concerning Koheiji as an angry ghost are not organically linked, and while interesting elements can be found in the approach to each individual section, the overall organization is rather insufficient." "Kaisetsu," *Yomihon I, Santō Kyōden zenshū* vol. 15 (Perikansha, 1994), 584.

<sup>139</sup> At this point in the narrative Hamon is known as Kijirō. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to him as Hamon throughout the text. Todoroki Unpei and Adachi Sakurō likewise change names at different points in the narrative, but for the sake of clarity I will refer to them consistently as Unpei and Sakurō.

he can find employment with a lord and revive the fortunes of the household. Before that day comes, however, crisis strikes: Hamon's grandmother and his father both fall ill, and soon the household is unable to pay for medicine and barely able to find food to eat. Hamon overhears his parents discussing extreme plans to attempt to save the household--pawning the heirloom sword that is the one link to the family's past, selling his mother into prostitution, suicide by his father--and he quickly determines to sacrifice his own life for the sake of the household. In the dead of night, in the depths of winter, he strips naked and does penance in the snow at a nearby temple of Kannon, the bodhisattva of mercy, praying that Kannon take his life and in exchange preserve his household. The cold north wind is as painful on his naked body "as though swords were piercing his flesh," but he is determined that his obligation to his household requires sacrificing his own life so that it might thrive.<sup>140</sup>

He is found in the snow by a similarly peripheral figure, an unemployed samurai named Todoroki Unpei, who saves Hamon's life, returns him to his family, and convinces him that he can earn the money that will save his household by selling himself into prostitution in Edo. Hamon's parents grieve as they send to Edo as a young prostitute the son they once thought would journey there as the retainer of a great lord; in either case, however, it is clear that Hamon's being is entirely oriented towards the salvation of the household. Unfortunately, Hamon's apparent savior Unpei is in fact a scoundrel. Having pocketed a profit from the signing of Hamon's contract, he proceeds, after Hamon's departure, to murder Hamon's father and grandmother in cold blood and abscond with the family's precious heirloom sword. Hamon's mother, driven to madness by grief, dies soon thereafter. Hamon's social being, peripheral and

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<sup>140</sup> Santō Kyōden, *Fukushū/Kidan: Asaka no numa*, in Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., *Santō Kyōden zenshū*, vol. 15 (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1994), 281.

endangered at the opening of the tale, has now hit absolute bottom: his household has been completely eliminated, its most symbolic possession has been stolen, and its heir has descended to the margins of society, living and working in the socially and morally peripheral entertainment district of Edo. The stage is set for a dramatic revenge narrative, in which Hamon will track down Todoroki Unpei, take his revenge, and in the process emerge from a state of social limbo to resurrect his defunct household and achieve the reintegration into the webs of social relations with a lord and a community to which his parents had aspired.

The other plot line of *The Pond of Asaka* follows Kohada Koheiji, who lives an existence in some ways more marginal than that of Hamon's family. Koheiji is an entertainer, based in Edo, and a bad one. "His skills as an actor were extremely poor," we are told, "and so he was not able to appear in the great kabuki of Edo, but sought work in rural performances around the various provinces and made his way through the world in great poverty."<sup>141</sup> He is an established member of a community--the socially marginal community of entertainers--but his reputation within that community is a poor one, with one exception: he can play the role of ghost better than any other actor. He also has a household, but only barely. His son has been adopted into the family of a more established actor to help alleviate the family's poverty, and his wife is a treacherous woman who hates her husband and regularly beats him until he bleeds. Koheiji has considered divorcing her, "but when he married her she brought twenty *ryō* of gold into the household, and since he had no way of paying it back, it was difficult to part with her, besides which he was quite dim and had no way to control her."<sup>142</sup> Unbeknownst to Koheiji, his wife has begun an affair with another marginal figure, a wandering drum player who goes by the name of

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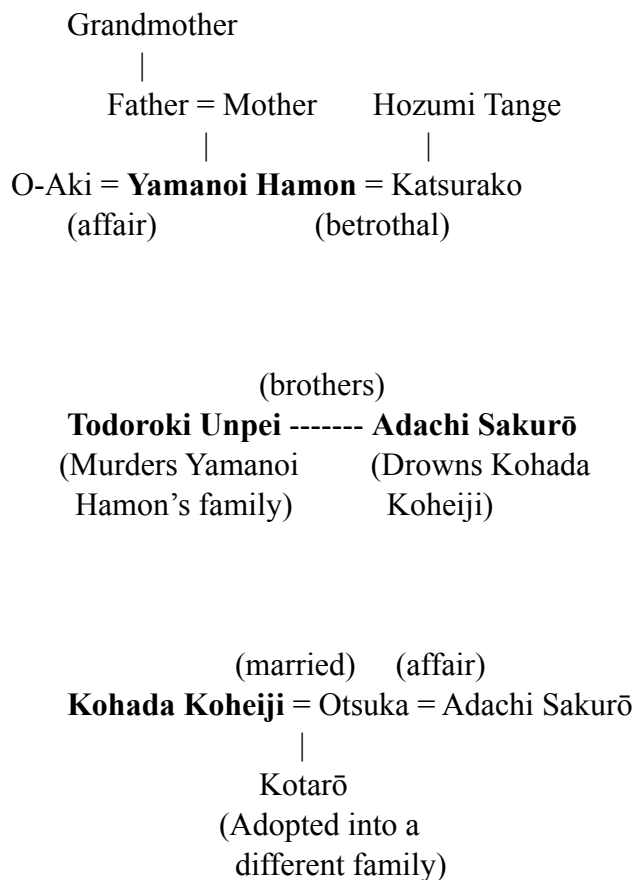
<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.



Adachi Sakurō, and who is none other than the younger brother of Todoroki Unpei, the murderer of Hamon's family. Before long, Sakurō and Koheiji's wife hatch a plot to murder him so that they can move in together. While Koheiji is traveling to perform in northern Honshū, Sakurō calls on him, invites him to go out boating on Asaka Pond, a beautiful site famed for its poetic associations, and then drowns Koheiji in the lake. Because of his social situation and the nature of the murder, there is no possibility that anyone will set out to take revenge for Koheiji's death. Even if it were known that he had been murdered, his son is too young to embark on a vendetta and has in any case been adopted into another family. The only being that can take revenge for Koheiji's unjust murder is the ghost of Koheiji himself.

*Primary characters and families in The Pond of Asaka*



What is striking in this tale of double revenge is the difference between the nature of vengeance on the part of the mirrored protagonists: one is restrained, the other indulgent. Hamon's vendetta is characterized by his self-negation and restraint; wandering far from home, without even a secure community or lord to answer to, he must still keep his full attention on the fulfillment of his quest. His greatest moment of danger, in fact, comes when he succumbs to personal pleasure and loses sight of his obligations to others. Hamon finds himself scouting a village in northern Honshū and renting a room next door to a beautiful young woman named O-Aki. O-Aki is the daughter of a rich merchant, and she has been raised in the wilds of Michinoku as though she were a proper young lady of the capital. She has a deeply poetic sensibility and immediately recognizes Hamon as a handsome, cultivated man. Before long, the two begin an secret affair. This is a grave transgression on Hamon's part. Not only does it distract him from his vendetta, but it is an offense against the one living link he has to a broader social identity. Hamon has a fiancée and a future father-in-law waiting for him once he completes his vendetta. This future father-in-law, a samurai named Hozumi Tange, is the one who tracked Hamon down in the theater districts of Edo, informed him of his parents' murder, bought out his contract, and provided him with the money to embark on his quest for vengeance. He also promised Hamon the hand of his beautiful daughter Katsurako upon the successful completion of the vendetta. In other words, Hamon owes Tange an enormous debt of obligation, because Tange has extended to him the possibility of reintegration into a socially respectable and protected state of being, as the son-in-law of a socially secure samurai household. Hamon's affair with O-Aki thus constitutes a stunning transgression that puts personal pleasure ahead of social obligation.

Hamon soon pays the price for it, when one morning O-Aki is found brutally stabbed to death in her own bedroom. The culprit is a wandering mendicant, who broke into O-Aki's room and murdered her when she resisted his sexual advances, but the young men of the village, aware of O-Aki's relationship with Hamon and deeply jealous, reveal their affair and formally accuse Hamon of the murder to the local governor. The entire village, including O-Aki's parents, swayed by the young men's slander, cry for Hamon's immediate execution. All that saves Hamon in this situation is the governor's recognition of his refined cultivation, a clue that leads him to doubt the murder charges. Some clever sleuth work determines who the real murderer is before the governor must carry out the death sentence on Hamon, but Hamon is keenly aware of the danger he has escaped, and he immediately links it to his failure of restraint:

我お秋が一旦の情に迷ひて復讐の事におこたり、且丹下殿の大恩を忘れて、今此災を身におふこと、天地神明の罰し玉ふなるべし。... 此儘冤屈の罪に一命を失はば、別に誰ありてか父の仇をむくゆべき。百余里をへだて、遠く此地に來り、犬死をなすことこれ何のむくいぞや。

Having lost myself to temporary feelings for O-Aki, I neglected my quest for revenge, and I also forgot the great debt I owe to Master Tange. This terrible misfortune now is surely a punishment from the gods of heaven and earth....I have led myself to this disaster. If I were to lose my life now for a crime I did not commit, who would take revenge against my father's murderer? To have come over one hundred miles to this distant place only to die a dog's death--what kind of revenge would that be?<sup>143</sup>

As with the avengers of Saikaku's fiction, even when loosed into the wandering life of "avenger time," on the road "over one hundred miles" from home, an anonymous figure in an unfamiliar village, far from the figures to whom he owes the precarious social identity he possesses, Hamon must still exercise constant restraint and sublimate his own desires and impulses to his obligations towards others.

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 330.

Restraint characterizes even the taking of revenge itself. Hamon's revenge is a straightforward matter of taking a life: as with all proper avengers, he is expected to strike down his enemy, deliver a death blow to his throat, and then sever his head, bringing it back as an offering to present at the grave of his family, and as a proof to his community that he has successfully completed his filial obligation. This established protocol of lethal vengeance has a clear social orientation. More important than the exact nature of the enemy's death is the presentation of the head both to the household (represented by the grave) and to the governing authority (which verifies the completion of the vendetta). This act marks the avenger's successful return to the everyday social realm from the alternate world of avenger time--and in revenge fiction it usually marks the beginning of a period of social flourishing, afforded to the successful avenger by his increased standing in his community and the rewards granted him by his lord. The protocol of even the killing itself thus emphasizes the fulfillment of the avenger's social obligations, *not* the expression of his own rancorous, personal emotions regarding the murderer of his family member. When Hamon eventually slays Unpei, after a lengthy duel on a beach at night in the far north of Honshū, he expresses no desire to make Unpei suffer, and he does not dwell on the hideous crimes that Unpei committed against his family. After cutting him down, his first thought is of recovering from Unpei the sword that symbolizes his household's samurai lineage, and his next thought is of his joy at being able to rejoin society, comparing himself to Su Wu of the Han dynasty, who spent nineteen years in exile among the Xiongnu before finally succeeding in returning to his homeland.<sup>144</sup> Even in his moment of direct confrontation with his

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 388.

enemy, his thoughts are focused on his household and the social integration that awaits him.

Formally severing and wrapping Unpei's head, he sets off to rejoin the ordinary human world.

As I have emphasized, all of this is typical of revenge narratives. We can see in Hamon's story a reaffirmation of the individual's obligations to the social relationships that characterize early modern selfhood, and we can read in his progress from social marginality and crisis to integration and flourishing one of the most perpetually appealing master narratives for early modern readers. What makes the story of Hamon unique and striking is its juxtaposition to the revenge taken by the vengeful ghost of Koheiji, a man whose death marked the end of a barely sustained social existence. Before his death Koheiji was, from the perspective of early modern Japan, as close to a ghost as a living person could be. In death, transformed into a real ghost, he suddenly becomes remarkably powerful--and in striking contrast to Hamon's moral restraint, Koheiji's vengeful power is bloodily indulgent, as Koheiji sets out to make his killers suffer, in exactly the same ways that he suffered at their hands.

After Sakurō drowns Koheiji, he conceals his body at the hideout of his brother Unpei, who has turned to banditry in the wake of murdering Hamon's family. Sakurō knows that Koheiji was recently paid five *ryō* of gold and had sewed it into the hem of his robe, and so he rips open the robe of the drowned, mud drenched corpse, removes the gold, and in his joy begins insulting Koheiji's dead body:

「汝ためしすくなき痴人かな。おのれ妻を我にぬすまるゝのみならず、今又我計におちてかく見ぐるしき死にざまをなす。これみな汝が愚なるによれば、人をうらむることなかれ。又汝泉下にゆくには此金も無用の物なれば、我にあたへて速に地獄に赴け。いで我引導すべし」といひつゝ、小平次が面に唾を吐かけけるが、怪哉死骸むく／＼とうごき、氷の如くにつめたき手を以て、役金をつかみたる、左九郎が手くびをしかとにぎりたれば、大に驚きひき放んとするに、手はは

なれずして死骸をともに引おこし、おもはず面を対したる時、小平次眼を見ひらきて、左九郎をにらみ...

‘What an rare idiot you are! Not only did I steal your wife, but you fell into my trap and met this ugly death. This is all because of your own stupidity, so don’t go holding any grudges. And since this money won’t be any use to you on your journey to the underworld, give it to me and head straight to hell! Here, I’ll send you off!’ he said, and spat on Koheiji’s face. But--how strange!--the corpse sprang into motion, and with a hand cold as ice it grabbed the wrist of the hand in which Sakurō held the gold. Sakurō, shocked, tried to pull the hand off, but it wouldn’t let go, and with each tug he pulled the corpse up, until he unexpectedly found himself face to face with it: at which point Koheiji opened his eyes and glared at Sakurō...<sup>145</sup>

Sakurō’s brother Unpei finally cuts Koheiji’s hand off with his sword, and even then the only way to get the hand to release its grip on Sakurō’s wrist is to cut off every single finger. Sakurō is unnerved by these unnatural events, but he takes the money and returns to Edo, where he promptly moves in with Koheiji’s wife Otsuka.

Before long, strange things begin to happen, and the couple begin to suspect that they are being haunted by the ghost of Koheiji. One night a drunk Sakurō awakes to find a man sleeping in his bed between him and Otsuka. Enraged, thinking Otsuka has taken a new lover, he stabs at the man, who vanishes with a dry laugh. Otsuka, trying to protect herself from the sword, grabs it with her hand, and her five fingers are immediately severed, just as Koheiji’s were, drenching the bed in blood. The wounds become infected, and Otsuka begins to lose her mind. Fearing that she has been cursed, Sakurō seeks the protection of the community, summoning the neighbors to conduct prayers for protection, but the protection he seeks is beyond the power of the human community. Instead, Sakurō follows the advice of a mendicant Shintō priest, who puts protective talismans on the doors and windows that temporarily keep the ghost at bay. Deceived into

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 353.

opening a window, however, Sakurō unwittingly lets in the ghost, who carries Otsuka away into a raging night storm, leaving behind only blood and hair, but no body. Now fearing for his own life, Sakurō invites into his desolate home a Zen monk, who says he can break the curse if Sakurō contributes to the ceremony a treasure equal to his life. Having sold everything in the house to pay for treatment for Otsuka, all he has left is the five *ryō* of gold he stole from Koheiji's corpse. He gives the money to the monk for the ceremony to exorcize the ghost from the house, but after the monk leaves he discovers that he has been swindled: the monk has stolen the gold pieces and replaced them with fakes. Not long after he encounters a man he believes to be the same monk by the shores of Shinobazu Pond. Sakurō confronts him, calls him a thief, and threatens to take him to the authorities, but the monk lifts his iron staff and strikes Sakurō with it, sending him tumbling into the lake with a splash and covering him in mud. Realizing that he in fact has the wrong monk, he attempts to apologize, but the monk, enraged, continues striking him with his staff, and finally spits in his face, just as Sakurō had spit in the face of Koheiji's muddy corpse. Smarting painfully from the blows, Sakurō barely makes it back to his empty house:

夢中になり、「たれやら来て我を水中にひきいれて水をのますは、咽をしむるは、あなくるしやたへがたや」と叫ひつゝ、あつき息をくるしげにつき、手脚もがき溺死ものゝごとくくるしみ、つひに其夜五更のころほひ狂ひ死にぞ死したりける。嗚呼おそるべし、淫婦お塚は五ツの指をきられ狂人となりて、ついにあやしき死をなし姦夫左九郎は、... 五両の金を賊僧にかたられ、人たがへして胸をうたれ、面上に唾をはかれ、池におちいりて泥に染り、水中にしめ殺るゝ人のごとくくるしみて、空家のうちに死し、家財塵ばかりも残らぬまで、都是小平次が冤魂の所為にて、因果のこまやかに報来しなりけり。

He fell into a daze. 'Someone has come and pulled me into the water, someone is forcing me to drink it, it's choking me. Ah, it's painful! I can't stand it!' he cried, and his

breathing became painful. He flailed his arms and legs just like a person suffering as he drowns. Around the fifth watch of the night, he died in a fit of madness. Ah, how terrifying! The unfaithful wife Otsuka had her fingers cut off, went mad, and died an unnatural death. The adulterer Sakurō...had five *ryō* of gold stolen from him by a monk, mistook a man and got beaten, had his face spat in, fell in a pond and got covered in mud, suffered like a man being drowned, and died alone in an empty house, leaving not a copper behind. This was all the doing of Koheiji, who repaid them with exact retribution.<sup>146</sup>

Unlike Hamon's socially mediated and emotionally restrained revenge against Unpei, Koheiji's version of revenge is an eye for an eye. It is a mode of revenge that is completely absent from Japanese narratives of filial vendetta, but familiar from other revenge literatures: the drama of Aeschylus, or the blood soaked stage of *Titus Andronicus*, or Seneca's *Thyestes*, with its famous line, "To revenge a crime you must go one better."<sup>147</sup>

There is no question that the "terrifying" actions of Koheiji are beyond the moral pale. A ghost is a morally compromised being, bound to the world by bonds of sinful emotion. No human being, moreover, could take revenge, on his own behalf no less, in such an indulgent manner, returning each injury in kind, and meet with public sanction. Yet there is undoubtedly an appeal to Koheiji's revenge, and a sense of poetic justice. We saw the familiar appeal of Hamon's story, the narrative of a socially marginalized figure who relies upon his talents and lineage to find a way back into the heart of society. Koheiji's narrative is also the story of a socially marginal figure, but one whose existence is so precarious that betrayal comes to him from within his own household, and who is deprived of any hope that revenge will be taken on his behalf. It is not difficult to see the appeal of Hamon's story to an early modern readership: in his triumph

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>147</sup> Seneca, *Six Tragedies*, trans. Emily Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 186. See also "The Choephoroi" of Aeschylus: "the voice of Justice cries: / Let word pay word, let hatred get / Hatred in turn, let murderous blow / meet blow that murdered" (lines 311-314). Aeschylus, *The Orestian Trilogy: Agamemnon, the Choephoroi, the Eumenides*, trans. by Philip Vellacott (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1959), 114-115.



lies an affirmation of the system of social relations that constructs early modern selfhood, and the promise that a being who properly prioritizes and fulfills his social obligations will meet with social success and security. Yet it is also possible to see the forbidden appeal of Koheiji's revenge, haunting the outskirts of this social vision: a lone individual, forsaken by every relationship and community, who nonetheless takes authority into his own hands, finds power in his personal emotions and grievances, and succeeds in achieving personal justice on his own terms.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have examined Edo period vendetta fiction in terms of the social relationships that were most vital to the individual in early modern Japan. I have argued that these relationships--with the household, the status community, and the ruling authority--are those at the heart of early modern vendetta narratives, and that much of the drama of these texts lies in the individual avenger's decisions and actions in terms of the claims these relationships make upon him. Attention to these social relations is crucial in considering Edo period popular fiction in general, not only vendetta narratives. I have argued, however, that vendetta fiction is uniquely suited to address these relationships, because the act of vendetta itself constitutes an affirmation of these social relations that simultaneously removes the avenger from their immediate protection--a state of affairs that opens up the rich narrative possibilities of what I have termed "avenger time."

In tales by Ihara Saikaku, I examined avenger protagonists placed in unique situations in which they are obliged to make decisions between conflicting claims of social obligation,

decisions that will dramatically impact their social meaning, but which they must make alone, without any guarantee of protection. These narrative situations, I argued, constitute a site not only for entertainment, but for reflection; they invite readers to step into the dilemma faced by the protagonists and to decide for themselves which obligations should ultimately take the highest priority. In Ueda Akinari's story "Suteishimaru," on the other hand, I argued that the author uses the narrative possibilities of "avenger time" to present a critique of the power social relationships have over the meaning of the individual self. Akinari's story, I suggested, depicts a character who is ultimately socially empowered by his willingness to reject social obligations that are unjust. Finally, in Santō Kyōden's work *The Pond of Asaka*, I traced two different narratives of revenge. I examined the appeal proffered by the story of the filial avenger, who escapes social marginalization and achieves recognition and success by restraining his personal emotions and devoting himself to his social obligations; I also suggested the attraction of the morally unsound but powerful vengeance of the ghost, who is socially forsaken but nonetheless succeeds in finding justice on his own, highly individual terms.

The temporal frame of this chapter has encompassed the whole of the Edo period. In each of the texts I have examined, I have focused on a *male* protagonist, and the "individual self" I have discussed throughout the chapter has generally been gendered male. My argument concerning the social position of the individual in early modern Japan has also focused on this position in the most general sense, without diving into the many differences and particularities that naturally attach to class, community, location, or moment. In the chapters that follow, my scope becomes more focused and specific in several ways. In the following chapter, for example, I sharply narrow my focus to the late 17th century, to one particular author, and to the

construction of female characters in vendetta fiction--some of them avengers, some not--with particular attention to the depiction of lower-class, working women. In Chapter Four, I jump to a different historical moment, the turn of the 19th century, and to a different set of genres; my focus will turn increasingly to other aesthetic registers of the texts and farther from the attention to plot that has largely dominated my discussion here. Nonetheless, the significance of "avenger time," and attention to the possibilities vendetta fiction affords for the re-imagination of social realities beyond the bounds of the narratives themselves, will remain important subtexts for my arguments going forward.

### Chapter Three:

#### Sex and Violence, Money and Morality: Economies of Vengeance in the Fiction of Ihara Saikaku

京極安智斎家中に吉田大介と言者、少の科を免ささるさへ有に、直に下知して十指を切、「是にても命助かりたひか」といはれしかは、大助眼をいからかしはたとにらみ、「いかに安智、己か様の大悪人の十方ないに仕へし事の悔さよ。侍の十の指を切れて何の用にか立へき。汝か口へ糞をひりこみたし。待てみよ。汝此家を頓て亡すへし」といひしを「悪」とて木に釣上て切れしと也。

Among the retainers of Kyōgoku Yasutomo there was a man named Yoshida Daisuke. Unforgiven for some trifling lapse, [his master] immediately ordered that his ten fingers be cut off. "Having come to this," [the master] asked, "do you still wish me to spare your life?" Daisuke's eyes flashed as he stared back sharply. "Oh Yasutomo, how I regret that I ever served a villain as worthless as you! What use is a samurai with no fingers? How I would like to take a shit in your mouth. Wait and see. You and your entire house will surely come to ruin." But Yasutomo, with a cry of "Hateful!" had him strung up from a tree and executed.<sup>148</sup>

This short, brutal anecdote is included in Mukunashi Issetsu's (1631-?) collection

*Mongrel Collection of Things Written and Heard, Past and Present (Kokon inu chomonjū, 1684),*

a diverse assortment of *setsuwa* anecdotes by a minor *haikai* poet, with a tendency towards tales

about samurai and the supernatural. The anecdote itself is brief, rough, unadorned. Far more

interesting than the narrative itself is the form in which elements of it reappear, transformed, in

Ihara Saikaku's 1687 collection of 32 vendetta stories, *Record of the Transmission of the Martial*

<sup>148</sup>I have reproduced the Japanese text as found in Ōkubo Junko, ed., *Tōhoku daigaku fuzoku toshokan Kano bunko shozō Kokon inu chomonjū* (Hachinohe: Kokuritsu Hachinohe kōgyō kōtō senmon gakkō, 1996), 111, with the addition of punctuation to facilitate comprehension. For the purposes of the translation, I made reference to the passage as it is reproduced in Maeda Kingorō ed., *Budō denraiki*, Iwanami bunko (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 430. The author, Mukunashi Issetsu, appears to have trained as a Teimon haikai poet, and later to have turned to setsuwa-type fiction. A number of the narratives in Saikaku's *Budō denraiki* (1687) are thought to borrow elements directly from the *Kokon inu chōmonjū*, as in the case discussed here. The preface to *Nihon bushi kagami* (1696), a collection of short vendetta narratives also attributed to Issetsu, famously criticizes Saikaku's depiction of warriors as completely lacking in veracity. For a brief critical discussion of *Kokon inu chomonjū*, see Matsuda Osamu. "Inu chomonjū kanken," in *Matsuda Osamu chosaku shū*, vol. 8, 213-229 (Tokyo: Yūbun shoin, 2003).

*Way (Budō denraiki)*. The scene now takes place in an autumn garden, dyed red with crimson maple leaves, in the mansion of a dissolute samurai. The retainer has been transformed into a beautiful woman, a contractually hired concubine, who stands, stripped naked, in the garden before the other hired women of the household, facing punishment for the (false) accusation of having a secret lover. Before being instructed to cut off a finger, she is first forced to rip out each of her fingernails: both acts are not arbitrary punishments, but brutal, customary practices (*shinjū*) by which a courtesan of the pleasure quarters could show her dedication to a favored customer. Ordered to sever a finger, the woman--calm and retrained up to this point--finally flies into a rage and curses her lover-employer:

いかに命がをしきとて、其身になりては何かせんなし。さりとは / \ 畜生にはおとれり。此一念、外にはゆかじ。心まかせに。

No matter how much I valued my life, there would be no point in living after that. Well, well, you really are lower than a beast. My resentment will follow you everywhere. Do what you will.<sup>149</sup>

The samurai then kills her. Thus is a vendetta set in motion, one in which the dead woman will be avenged by her sexually precocious younger sister. The story, which plays deftly with sexual politics and gender differences, is titled, "A Woman Can Write in a Man's Hand" (*Onna no tsukureru otoko moji*).

The appropriation and transformation of Issetsu's crude narrative are only two among the many elements that make Saikaku's lengthier, more sophisticated, and linguistically far more complex work (which I will discuss in greater detail below) compelling. Yet attention to its incorporation also highlights the hazards involved in selecting revenge as the primary frame of

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<sup>149</sup> Ihara Saikaku. *Budō denraiki*. In Taniwaki Masachika, Fuji Akio, and Inoue Toshiyuki, eds. *Budō denraiki, Saikaku okimiyage, Yorozu no fumihōgu, Saikaku nagori no tomo*. Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai 77 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 171.

analysis for works that can be classed as "vendetta narratives" simply by virtue of containing a vendetta within the plot. The entire, violent scene in Saikaku's narrative does constitute the prelude to a vendetta. Yet the elements he incorporates into this prelude--the transformation of Issetsu's samurai into a hired concubine; the reinterpretation of the severed fingers in terms of bloody practices of the pleasure quarters; the rewriting of the execution of a retainer as the excessive punishment of a contractual employee--reach beyond the bounds of this vendetta collection to touch upon themes that are vitally alive throughout Saikaku's fiction: gender difference, the violence of desire, the ambiguous morality of the marketplace. Reading the complete narrative, the element of revenge comes to feel like just one piece among many that are all oriented towards these larger themes. The text incorporates an Issetsu story; it also contains a vendetta--but neither is necessarily what the story is about.

In this chapter I switch from the approach of the preceding two chapters to adopt one that is textually and temporally more narrowly focused, but thematically more expansive. I will focus upon the vendetta works of only one author--Ihara Saikaku--and I will examine only a limited subset of his sizable body of vendetta narratives. I will, however, read these works within the broader world of Saikaku's larger fictional oeuvre--thinking about them in relation to other works, pervasive themes, and Saikaku's unique relationship to style and form--as well as with reference to specific social and economic contexts of the late 17th century. Specifically, I use these narratives as a unique window into Saikaku's persistent concern with the figure of the lower-class working woman. Within the context of the rapid urbanization and dramatic economic transformations of the 17th century, working women comprised a subject of both moral anxiety and sexual objectification; they also form a rich and consistent subject of Saikaku's literary

imagination, most famously in *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (*Kōshoku ichidai onna*, 1686), published the year before the narratives I examine here. I argue that Saikaku's treatment of the female characters in these vendetta tales problematizes the negative moral assumptions about lower-class working women in contemporary discourse, through sophisticated, sympathetic narratives that elevate these figures morally while pointing to the moral and social contradictions of the economy in which they participate. The role of vendetta within this narrative dynamic, as a morally-charged practice in which life and death hang in the balance, serves to push the moral ironies of the narratives to their extremes, thereby bringing the contradictions that surround lower-class working women into sharp relief and providing a fresh angle of approach to themes that are ultimately pervasive throughout Saikaku's work. I thus intend to show the ways in which the topos of vendetta in early modern popular fiction can be understood as something that is good to think with--even if the subject that is thought about is not necessarily revenge itself.

### **The Vengeance Variations and the "Vendetta Effect"**

While Ihara Saikaku was active as a *haikai* poet for much of his life, beginning as a teen in the mid-1650s, his fiction-writing career was remarkably brief: only eleven years mark the time between the publication of his first work of fiction, the surprise hit *The Life of an Amorous Man* (*Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, 1682) and his death in 1693.<sup>150</sup> Published in 1687, the story collection I examine here, *Record of the Transmission of the Martial Way*, falls almost precisely at the midpoint of these years, and it marks a turning point in Saikaku's subject matter. Saikaku's

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<sup>150</sup> Saikaku's disciples continued to publish works based on drafts that were still unpublished at the time of his death; the last of these, *Saikaku nagori no tomo*, was published in 1696. Saikaku's most active publishing years were 1682-1689, with multiple publications coming out each year from 1686-1688; these numbers sharply tapered off in 1689, and until 1692, the year prior to his death, he published almost no fiction.

first works, many of which include the erotically suggestive word *kōshoku* (“sensuality” or “amorousness”) in the title, took as their subject sensual attraction between the sexes, focusing first primarily on the pleasure quarters, and then, in works like *Five Amorous Women* (*Kōshoku gonin onna*, 1686) and *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, moving outward to depict other spaces and various classes.<sup>151</sup> With the publication of *The Great Mirror of Male Love* (*Nanshoku ōkagami*) in 1687, Saikaku began to devote sustained energy to the representation of the samurai class; samurai are the subject of the first half of that collection's forty narratives.<sup>152</sup> Three more collections dedicated almost entirely to representations of samurai follow. *Record of the Transmission of the Martial Way* is the first of these.

In the brief preface to *Transmission*, the narrator claims to have assembled tales of loyalty and vendettas from throughout the various provinces, and the work itself is subtitled "Vendettas from Various Provinces" (*shokoku katakiuchi*). While what precisely is meant in this preface by "loyalty" (*chūgi*) is debatable, the collection of thirty-two narratives does indeed contain a vendetta in each of its stories, set throughout the length and breadth of the archipelago, from southern Kyushu to the Matsumae domain in Ezo (Hokkaido). While the latter half of the Edo period saw vendetta practice extend throughout all the classes of early modern Japan, in Saikaku's time it was still largely the prerogative of the samurai; vendetta was therefore an effective theme for organizing a collection focusing on the samurai class.

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<sup>151</sup> The female protagonists of *Five Amorous Women* come from the townsman class, and the heroine of *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, born an aristocrat, travels through a highly diverse range of spaces and social statuses, living at different times as a daimyō's wife, a madam in the pleasure quarters, a domestic servant, a seamstress, and a streetwalker.

<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of the role of samurai narratives within the *Great Mirror of Male Love*, see Paul Gordon Schalow, "Introduction," *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, by Ihara Saikaku, trans. by Paul Schalow (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 1-46, esp. 27-34.



Yet it would be an oversimplification to claim that *Transmission* is "about" vendetta; the narratives encompass such a diverse and imaginative range of material, and the collection's depiction of samurai is so idiosyncratic, some scholars have questioned whether it should even be considered to be "about" samurai.<sup>153</sup> The vendetta conceit itself becomes highly plastic in Saikaku's hands; every narrative within *Transmission* contains a vendetta in some form, but the beginnings and ends of the vendettas do not necessarily map neatly onto the openings and conclusions of the narratives, the way they largely do, for example, in illustrated fiction (*kusazōshi*) of the late Edo period. Sometimes the basic revenge structure of "injury, anticipation, and reaction" is drawn out to encompass the entire length of the narrative; in other instances it is condensed to a small point, perhaps embedded within a larger story or series of subplots that have little explicit connection to it.<sup>154</sup> In "Plucking the Depths of the Heart on Lute Lake" (*Shintei o hiku Biwa no umi*), the lengthy first story that opens this purported collection of vendetta tales, for example, a vendetta takes shape only within the final few lines; the pages leading up to it are primarily concerned with a narrative of love, dedication, and suicide between a retired samurai and his two former male lovers, none of whom is directly involved in the vendetta itself. Their story can be considered a lengthy prologue to the "injury" stage of the vendetta narrative, with the "anticipation" and "reaction" stages highly condensed into just a few

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<sup>153</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the reception of *Transmission*, see Satō Satoko, "Budō denraiki," in *Saikaku to ukiyo zōshi kenkyū Vol. 3: Kinsen*, ed. by Taniwaki Masachika, Sugimoto Yoshinobu, and Sugimoto Kazuhiro (Tokyo: Kasama shoin, 2010), 184-187. Satō highlights a division running through the history of scholarship on *Transmission*, between seeing the text as commenting specifically on the samurai class, and seeing it as a commentary--via the samurai class--on issues inherent to humanity more broadly defined. I have addressed some aspects of the debate on Saikaku's warrior works in the previous chapter.

<sup>154</sup> The articulation of the fundamental revenge structure ("Ur-revenge action") as "injury-anticipation-reaction" is found in John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: From Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 5.

lines.<sup>155</sup> At times it appears that the commitment to including a vendetta in each narrative indeed makes revenge more a structure than a subject in *Transmission*, its injury-anticipation-reaction sequence fulfilling a function akin to the 5-7-5 // 7-7 pattern of a *haikai* sequence, providing a basic (albeit highly malleable) pattern onto which the author can layer a diverse and elaborate range of material, themes, and scenarios.<sup>156</sup> Among the numerous narratives of the collection, moreover, details and scenarios recur, repeat, and double, each time with different nuances or interpretations, making the collection resemble a true series of contrapuntal variations.<sup>157</sup> As a result of this and other idiosyncrasies of Saikaku's style, the narratorial stance is difficult to pin down, the moral attitude to the material remaining in a perpetual state of flux.

In this context, it is ultimately less productive to attempt to discern a narratorial stance towards vendetta itself, and more valuable to try to think about what the presence of a vendetta effects in each narrative. *Transmission of the Martial Way* is an excellent example of what I term the "vendetta effect." The narrative frame of a vendetta, by establishing a morally-charged goal

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<sup>155</sup> The story of these three characters does, however, indirectly precipitate the vendetta that takes shape at the very end; the majority of the narrative can thus be considered a lengthy prologue to the much briefer vendetta. This being Saikaku, the relationship between this first part of the narrative and the larger theme of vendetta is also quite complex at a variety of levels; it could be argued, for example, that with this first story the author sets up an ironic contrast between the (banned) practice of following one's master in death and the (permitted) practice of vendetta--both remnants of a warrior culture that is out of date in an age of peace.

<sup>156</sup> It may be noted that Saikaku's revenge fiction is, in this sense, far more versatile than the works of the vendetta boom in popular fiction at the turn of the 19th century, for example. Those works follow a well-established set of conventions that govern the construction of avengers and enemies, the kinds of travails faced by the avenger in the pursuit of the enemy, and the obligatory celebratory conclusion; the initial injury typically occurs near the opening of the narrative, and the revenge is carried out (inevitably successfully) just before the end. In a vendetta narrative by Saikaku there is no guarantee that the enemy will be killed at all; avengers are not necessarily virtuous and enemies not necessarily villainous; and (as noted above) the revenge plot may comprise little more than one kernel or corner of the larger narrative.

<sup>157</sup> Sometimes even minuscule details repeat in altered form across different stories. There are, for example, three separate stories that feature recluses; each recluse has the character *mu* (dream) in his name: Ganmu (Dream-Seer), Zuimu (Dream-Follower), and Muraku (Dream Pleasure). Each name can be interpreted as having a special significance within its individual narrative, but the link between names also encourages us to read the stories of these recluses against one another, thus generating additional meanings through the act of comparison and contrast. I discuss the stories involving Zuimu and Muraku--which indeed bear resemblances beyond the matter of names--in the latter half of this chapter.

(the completion of a revenge) that necessarily forces life and death into the balance, effectively pushes to their extremes many other elements of the narrative that in different contexts might constitute little more than incidental details--a misheard greeting, a second glance at a woman's face, a mistaken identity--drawing out unexpected implications and aspects of them in the process. Saikaku is a master of making rich use of this "vendetta effect," which allows him to explore and invent deeper dimensions to themes that are already vital forces in his work beyond the bounds of his vendetta fiction. The elements I focus on in this chapter, for example--working women, the moral stature of the female body, and the conflict between moral and money economies--are to be found throughout Saikaku's writing. Imagining them through the frame of the vendetta narrative, which demands bloodshed, and which itself necessarily comes accompanied with a complete set of moral associations that can play into these larger themes in compelling ways, simply opens up new and dramatic possibilities for exploring these broader themes.<sup>158</sup>

### **The Challenges and Possibilities of Saikaku's Style**

The challenges and fascinations of *Transmission of the Martial Way* extend beyond theme and structure. With any work by Ihara Saikaku, one must confront the volatile matter of his language and style. Compared to a work with language as densely textured as Saikaku's first book of fiction *The Life of an Amorous Man* (language so dense it feels at times as though light cannot escape its surface), the language of *Transmission* is relatively lucid. Nonetheless, familiar

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<sup>158</sup> We can find elements of the narratives I will discuss here--the moral status of working women, the moral mechanics of a money economy, the clash between different orders of value--richly explored in very different ways in non-vendetta-related works such as *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (*Kōshoku ichidai onna*, 1686), *Five Amorous Women* (*Kōshoku gonin onna*, 1686), *Japan's Eternal Storehouse* (*Nippon eitaigura*, 1688), *Worldly Mental Reckonings* (*Seken munezan'yō*, 1692), to name but a few.

Saikaku elements are all present: heavy allusiveness to and incorporation of works of prose, poetry, and drama, Japanese and Chinese, famous and obscure; spectacularly elliptical phrasing; and densely layered meanings relying on poetic devices such as pivot words (*kakekotoba*) and associated words (*engo*). Saikaku's language is so reliant upon poetic techniques and the omissions and contractions permitted by classical Japanese syntax that it not only translates lumpily into English, it does not even translate particularly well into modern Japanese.<sup>159</sup> A single example will suffice to demonstrate these features at work. The following is the entire, succinct preface to *Transmission of the Martial Way*:

和朝兵揃の中に、為朝のくろがねの弓、むさし坊が長刀、朝比奈がちからこぶ、  
かげ清が眼玉、これらは見ぬ世の事、中古、武道の忠義、諸国に高名の敵うち、  
其はたらき聞伝て、筆のはやし詞の山、心のうみ静に、御松久かたの雲に、よろ  
こびの舞鶴是を集ぬ。

A rough translation into English requires undoing the remarkable brevity and elliptical phrasing of Saikaku's expression, forcing meanings to become much more specific and monovalent:

Among the warriors of Japan, we find Tametomo with his bow of iron, Musashibō's halberd, the biceps of Asahina, Kagekiyo's eyeballs: these are all of a world no longer seen. I have heard tell of acts of loyalty of the martial way, and of famous vendettas in the various provinces, carried out in the recent past. With writing replete as forests, and words as abundant as mountains, and with a boundless heart still as a quiet sea--as quiet as the seas in this age of peace, which is timeless as the pine and celebrated by the cranes that dance amongst the distant clouds--I, Saikaku, have compiled these tales.<sup>160</sup>

Even this translation, significantly longer than the original, sacrifices a range of nuances and suggestions present in the preface's deceptively spare lines. The objects listed in the opening

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<sup>159</sup> Hatanaka Chiaki has published an entire book examining the ways in which the translation of Saikaku into European languages (primarily English and French) dramatically alters the text, forcing the specification of subject, for example, which is often left pregnantly ambiguous in the original. See Hatanaka Chiaki, *Kagami ni utsutta Saikaku: hon'yaku kara aratana yomi e* (Tokyo: Ōfū, 2009). In fact, the translation of Saikaku into modern Japanese forces mutations of the original language as well. A single phrase of Saikaku, rich with pivot words, may have to be written out as three separate sentences to be comprehensible in modern Japanese, and copious annotations are often necessary to explicate the rich allusiveness of the text to a modern Japanese reader.

<sup>160</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 4.

clauses--“Tametomo’s bow of iron, Musashibō’s halberd, the biceps of Asahina, Kagekiyo’s eyeballs”--are each in themselves synecdoches of larger narratives and personalities. In “Kagekiyo's eyeballs,” for example, a contemporary reader would presumably recognize the story of the early medieval warrior Kagekiyo gouging out his own eyeballs in deference to Minamoto no Yoritomo, a popular theme in old *jōruri* plays.<sup>161</sup> Thus in the opening few words we have a richly intertextual, allusive interweaving of story, personality, and incident, which Saikaku, at the end of the sentence--and in a move typical of his style--abruptly negates. The sentence conjures up these story-worlds, only to remark that they belong to a different world, one no longer seen. Instead, the narrator explains, he will focus upon the warriors of what I have translated as “the recent past”--the original term, *chūko*, literally “middle past,” is supremely ambiguous.<sup>162</sup> Whether it is indeed an “I” who has heard tell of these events, or whether the events have simply been heard of--are known and circulated as stories among a wider populace--is unclear. Does “loyalty” refer to acts of loyalty, or simply to the principle of loyalty, or to both simultaneously? “The forest of the brush” is a set phrase used to refer to copious writing; Saikaku embellishes it with “mountains of words,” and then uses “forest” and “mountains” to link to “seas,” describing the profound or boundless heart (*kokoro no umi*) of the author, while at the same time referencing the still seas that are conventionally used to praise the age of peace ruled by the Tokugawa shoguns, themselves obliquely referenced in the mention of the pine, which is not only a symbol of timelessness (and an expression of the desire that the shoguns' reign may be everlasting), but also a play on the name of the *Matsudaira* clan from which the

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<sup>161</sup> See *Budō denraiki*, 4, n. 5.

<sup>162</sup> The ambiguity of this term sends a ripple throughout the entire collection, which is clearly set in a late 17th century milieu but at times suggests a setting in the past, either the Warring States or the first decades of the Edo period.

Tokugawa house emerged. The word *hisakata* reinforces the sense of longevity while also referring to the distant quality of the clouds in which felicitous, symbolic cranes dance, further celebrating the present rule, while the “dancing crane” also refers to none other than Saikaku himself, whose sobriquet literally means “Western Crane.” The overall effect of this succinct passage is a sense of a linguistic texture that is simultaneously dense and (because of its elliptic construction) light, all delivered at high speed.

When turned to the representation of narrative, the effect produced by these distinctive features of Saikaku's language is such that even a relatively brief, apparently straightforward story can contain, wrapped up within it, allusive resonances, brief asides, sub-narratives, jokes, tonal reversals, and rapid shifts of voice. The result is a dynamic effect--multivocal, richly textured, off-balance--that keeps any straightforward unity of language, story, and meaning destabilized. To take a very brief example from one of *Transmission*'s narratives, in “A Sudden New Year’s of ‘Knock Knock, Who’s There?’” (*Monomō dore to iu niwaka shōgatsu*), for example, the family of a slain samurai rushes in anger to the home of the man who killed him, only to be met at the front gate by the killer's mother:

善太夫一家、はだし馬にてかけあつまり、十太郎かたへ行に、表の門をも閉ず、母の親壺人、藤縄目のよろひを着て、くれなひの天巻、長刀の鞘はづして、鞍掛に腰を置て、一命をしまぬ眼色、「いにしへの巴・山吹も、かくあらん」と、見し人、いさぎよくほめて、女なればかまはず、十太郎国を立のく事を聞届けて、をの／＼屋かたに帰りて...

Zendayū's family gathered without even saddling their horses and rushed to Jūtarō's house, where they found the front gate open and before it Jūtarō's mother, alone. She wore patterned leather armor and a headband of crimson, and had unsheathed her halberd and seated herself upon a footstool with a look in her eyes that showed she did not begrudge her life. Those who saw her praised her splendidly, saying, “Surely Tomoe and Yamabuki must have been just like this!” But since she was a woman they did not bother

with her, and when they heard that Jūtarō had fled the province they each returned home.<sup>163</sup>

There is a speed to the phrasing, a rapid build-up of tension as the description plunges from the charge of Zendayū's enraged family to the stolid, intimidating appearance of Jūtarō's mother awaiting them at the gate. Culminating in the allusive reference to Tomoe and Yamabuki, the two martially skilled consorts of the warrior Kiso Yoshinaka (1154-1184) said to have stood by him on the battlefield, two elements take shape in the space of a few concise phrases: one is an expectation of conflict between the furious family and this undaunted woman prepared for battle, and the other is a sense of the imposing impressiveness of the woman herself. And then, suddenly, in mid-sentence, the whole thing deflates: the onlookers praise her, and seemingly almost in the same breath dismiss her, "because she was a woman," and go home. Has the entire, brief scene been the build-up to a punchline? If so, what does this punchline--the discounting of a seemingly imposing woman *because* she is a woman--signify? No further explanation is given, and the action of the story immediately shifts elsewhere, making this scene a small, self-contained unit within the larger narrative. Because of the rapidity of such shifts in tone, which set up a scenario in one way, only to add a detail that necessitates a sudden reinterpretation--rather as the addition of a new link in a *haikai* sequence reinterprets the previous link--it can be difficult to know how to analyze specific details of a Saikaku narrative in terms of the unified whole.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 26.

<sup>164</sup> The question of the extent to which we can understand many of these particularities of Saikaku's style--particularly its instability and openness to constant reinterpretation--in terms of Saikaku's lengthy and unique career as a *haikai* poet remains a contentious one in the world of Saikaku studies. There is always the danger of feeling one has "solved" a problem of Saikaku's fiction by referring to it as "haikaiesque"--an deceptive concept that must ultimately be only one step in the attempt to understand the relationship between Saikaku's poetry and his fiction. There is, nonetheless, a clear parallel between the way Saikaku's language tends constantly to reinterpret or rework details or scenarios introduced into his narratives, and the *haikai* requirement that a new link in a *haikai* sequence reinterpret the meaning of the previous link while pushing away from the meaning of the link preceding that one. For a consideration of the relationship between Saikaku's poetry and fiction, see for example Inui Hiroyuki, "Saikaku 'haikai to ukiyozōshi' jo," *Bungaku* 48, no. 3 (1980): 127-143.

Indeed, it raises doubts as to whether the narrative constitutes a unified whole at all to begin with. At the same time, the detail or fragment, which may ultimately seem incidental to the story at hand, floats off to join other such fragments from other narratives in the collection--other moments of women behaving in ways typically gendered male, for example--linking together to form a web of possible meanings that reach out to one another beyond the bounds of individual stories. These many challenges, quirks, and idiosyncrasies of Saikaku's style (of which I have here outlined only a few) thus make the question of where to locate meaning in Saikaku a difficult one.

### **Saikaku's Women**

Thus, while Saikaku can be considered a popular writer, and a prolific one at that, who wrote at apparently great speed to fulfill the demands of a print marketplace, the sophistication and complexity of his language, and the de-centered nature of his works, demand that he be read carefully, without jumping to conclusions. This demand is particularly valid when it comes to any attempt to understand the position of women in Saikaku's texts. As the existence of such major works as *Five Amorous Woman* and *The Life of an Amorous Woman* may suggest, the figure of "woman" is highly charged in Saikaku's world of representation, but the precise nature of the charge can be difficult to pin down--as it is, for example, in the depiction of Jūtarō's armor-clad mother above. The rapid shifts of narratorial voice and tone can leave the reader wondering precisely what moral stance is being adopted towards the female characters portrayed in any particular story. A typical gesture involves the inclusion of expressions that explicitly gender a female character's actions, thoughts, or feelings, while marking them in a negative



way--phrases such as, "her unreliable woman's heart" (*onnagokoro hakanaki*), or "her woman's heart was shallow" (*onnagokoro asamashiku*)--but doing so within the context of narratives that ultimately depict these female characters as far more impressive and reliable than the male characters who surround them. The language of the narratives can thus appear to run in two directions at once, with allusions to the "unreliability of a woman's heart" articulating the assumptions of contemporary discourse--assumptions that are then deftly unlaced by the narrative itself. The experience, and perhaps the meaning, of such a narrative emerges in the tension between the two.

Indeed, in Saikaku's works we can discern a keen attentiveness to the gendered politics of representation, to questions of who speaks for whom. *The Life of an Amorous Woman* provides one of the most noteworthy examples of Saikaku's sophisticated treatment of such questions. The work, for the most part, is strikingly narrated in the first-person voice of its female protagonist. The opening frame of the work, however, sets that voice at a double remove: the entire narrative is depicted as discourse overheard by an eavesdropping man, the original "I" in whose voice the story opens. Moreover, this man reports the woman's story as he claims to have heard her relate it to two other men, who themselves commission it from her as a performance of sorts, even specifying how they would like to hear the story told:

身のうへの昔を時勢に語り給へ

Tell the story of your past life in the manner of the present day.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> The characters 時勢 are glossed with the pronunciation *imayō*, making the sense of "present day" more explicit than it appears in the Japanese above. Ihara Saikaku, *Kōshoku ichidai onna*, in Teruoka Yasutaka and Higashi Akimasa, eds., *Ihara Saikaku shū 1: Kōshoku ichidai otoko, Kōshoku gonin onna, Kōshoku ichidai onna*, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 66 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1996), 399.

Appropriately the woman begins her story in the nature of a performance, first accepting a cup of *sake* from the men, then singing, and finally commencing her story. Thus the apparently straightforward, at times confessional narrating voice of the woman must be understood as taking shape in dialogue with the desires and instructions of the listening men, and then recounted in her voice by another man who has eavesdropped on it all. This narrative frame not only underlines the complicated power relations involved in speech between men and women, it also points to the politics of representation underlying the work itself, as a narrative composed in a woman's voice by a male author (Saikaku). Moreover, the first-person narration of the woman's story, which traces her (often erotic or sexualized) experiences and her attempts to make a living in a variety of trades and social communities, right down to the lowest level of streetwalker, concludes in the voice of a medieval confession tale (*sangemono*), suggesting a judgment of sinfulness to the woman's life; yet that same allusive hint simultaneously elevates her experiences as giving her a deeper, almost spiritual insight into the human condition. Such tensions in the portrayal of the woman's life--between sin and salvation, appearance and reality, transgression and felicitation, comedy and tragedy--run throughout the work, animating it with their contrasts.<sup>166</sup>

This question of the moral status of women--particularly those judged as morally tainted in contemporary discourse, such as the women of the pleasure quarters--sounds a persistent note in Saikaku's writing, even beyond the bounds of his fiction. In 1684, for example, Saikaku the *haikai* poet published an anthology titled *The Thirty-Six Female Immortals of Haikai, Old and*

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<sup>166</sup> It is telling that the history of the modern reception of *The Life of an Amorous Woman* involves a long-running debate about whether the story of its female protagonist should be understood as a tragedy, a comedy, or both, or neither. I have witnessed this debate spontaneously materialize in an American classroom where the students--nearly all of them encountering Saikaku for the first time--were assigned the English translation of *Amorous Woman*; many thought it hilariously ribald, others found it troubling and tragic.

*New (Kokin haikai onna kasen)*, which assembles thirty-six *haikai* verses, each composed by a different female poet and accompanied by a brief prose encomium and attractive portrait. In his preface, Saikaku presents the collection as worthy of emulation by young women--specifically suggesting that it can be used to teach handwriting to daughters--and he also highlights the fact that he has included poems composed by courtesans:

女歌仙とあらためる中に。淫肆の女もあり。此道になげく心を種なれば。何か哥書にへだてはなし。世 / \ の集もゆるされて見へける。

When I was selecting the poetic immortals for this anthology, there were women of pleasure among them. The grieving heart is the root of this Way [of Poetry], and so there [should be] no discriminations in a book of poems. We see that [such inclusions] were permitted in [*waka*] anthologies throughout the ages.<sup>167</sup>

Throughout this preface there is a stress on elevating the low through the power of language: Saikaku emphasizes the elevation of *haikai* via its connection to the more prestigious *waka*, the elevation of women in general by virtue of their poetic skill, and here specifically the elevation of socially low courtesans through their participation (emotional and literary) in the Way of Poetry. As so often in Saikaku, an overturning of moral assumptions is effected through the bringing together of different orders of value: through the medium of poetry, the socially low courtesan is translated into a figure worthy of inclusion among the ranks of court poets throughout the ages.

### Urban Working Women in the Seventeenth Century

As with the courtesans included in Saikaku's anthology, and the figure of the *Amorous Woman* herself, Saikaku's writing evinces a persistent interest in the moral status of women who

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<sup>167</sup> Ihara Saikaku, *Kokin haikai onna kasen*, in Ebara Taizō, Teruoka Yasutaka, and Noma Kōshin, eds., *Teihon Saikaku zenshū*, vol. 11.1 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1972), 463.

work for a living outside the context of the household. Indeed, Saikaku's late 17th century moment marks the culmination of a series of changes and modernizations over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries that had dramatically altered the landscape of female labor in the archipelago, particularly in the cities. A number of these transformations are examined in a nuanced article on female labor and moral discourse by the historian of early modern labor Yokota Fuyuhiko.<sup>168</sup> Yokota examines the ways in which the growth of large cities following the establishment of the Tokugawa peace provided new opportunities for female labor, including labor beyond the bounds of the walled-off pleasure quarters. One significant means of employment was domestic service; drawing on the information contained in family registers, for example, he estimates that around the end of the 17th century, "between one-quarter and one-half of the female population in various sections of Kyoto and Osaka were servants."<sup>169</sup> Meanwhile, the growth of cotton production from the 16th century on, with its multiple, specialized steps of production, also fostered the growth of an urban textile industry that employed women on a subcontracted basis. This was not refined work, but it made it possible for an urban-dwelling woman to earn a living through her own labor, independent of the household. As Yokota emphasizes, "this 'women's work,' instead of being done by wives to maintain their families' self-sufficiency, now integrated women into the work force, into a social system of production and marketing."<sup>170</sup> At the same time, the low status of the labor performed by these women, and their independence of the surveillance of the household, marked them in moral and erotic discourse as

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<sup>168</sup> Yokota Fuyuhiko, "Imagining Working Women in Early Modern Japan," translated by Mariko Asano Tamanoi, in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, ed. by Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan: 1999), 153-167.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 163. Yokota's discussion of the effects of the switch from hemp to cotton in clothing production draws on the work of Nagahara Keiji.

sexually loose and available. Yokota notes, for example, that the *Great Mirror of the Way of Love* (*Shikidō ōkagami*, 1678), an encyclopedic work by Fujimoto Kizan (1626-1704) on erotic relationships and the pleasure quarters (and a work that had a significant influence on Saikaku's writing), includes a section on how to seduce various urban working women, including:

prostitutes, waitresses, maids, factory workers, and the wives of townsmen. This suggests that all women on the list--whether or not they were explicitly engaged in sexual labor as prostitutes--were regarded as sexually loose (prostitutelike) as long as they had contact with the wider society through their work. In this literature, all female labor has a sexual dimension; every woman is in some sense for sale.<sup>171</sup>

Yokota sees the rise in restrictive moral discourses in women's education around this time as another facet of this same popular perception, a way of constructing "internal norms of self-restraint so intensive and excessive that working women would be able to protect themselves from the accusation of being sexually corruptible."<sup>172</sup> This tension in contemporary discourse on women, between moral restraint, sexual availability, and the independence afforded by the urban labor marketplace, dramatically informs Saikaku's treatment of the figure of the lower-class working woman, a figure he turns to consistently throughout his work, including in his samurai works and vendetta tales.

### **The Clash of Economies in Saikaku's Fiction**

These very tensions may be part of what draws Saikaku to these figures, for the tension--or outright clash--between different orders of value is one of the dynamics that underlies and animates all of Saikaku's fiction. While Saikaku never uses the specific term "economy," I have

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 164. The section he refers to can be found in Fujimoto Kizan, *Shinpan Shikidō ōkagami*, ed. by Shinpan Shikidō ōkagami kankōkai (Tokyo: Yagi shoten, 2006), 439-477.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 165.

come to think of this word--with its suggestions of pathways of circulation, exchange, and value--as highly useful for examining much of what is alive in this author's works, particularly in terms of money, morality and desire. Underlying Saikaku's most compelling fiction are the dynamics that emerge when these three different vectors of human interaction and experience--each with its own networks of circulation, its own notions of exchange, its own conceptions of value--come into contact with one another, overlapping, intermingling, or at times violently erupting. The moral virtue of filial piety that underlies vendetta practice, for example, suggests a highly particular logic of exchange between parents and children, one that is very different from the exchanges involved in monetary transactions and the sale of goods; Saikaku's narratives often work to bring such different notions of exchange into contact or conflict with one another.

The rich potential of the encounter between different economies, and the question of how one will translate into the terms of the other, is dynamically illustrated, for example, in *Five Amorous Women*, published the year before *Transmission*. In the second narrative in the collection, "The Tale of the Cooper Who Filled His Barrel with Love" (*Nasake o ireshi taruya monogatari*), the action is set in Tenma, a lower-class district of Osaka, where the streets are haunted by ghosts, desire, and poverty. When an impoverished barrel maker falls in love with Osen, a beautiful young woman sent from her village into domestic service in the city, an old woman in the neighborhood agrees to aid him in his quest to win her. The cooper, however, is taken aback by the ease with which the crone agrees to help him, and he worries that she will expect a hefty payment in return:

「時分がらの世の中、金銀の入る事ならば、思ひながらなりがたし。あらば何かをしかるべし。正月に木綿着物、染めやうはこのみ次第、盆に奈らざらしの中位なるを一つ、内証はこんな事で埒の明くやうに」とたのめば、「それは欲にひか

るる恋ぞかし。我がたのまるるは、その分にはあらず。おもひつかする仕かけに  
大事あり。この年月、数千人のきもいり、つひにわけのあしきといふ事なし。菊  
の節句より前にあはし申すべし」と...

"In this world in which money is hard to come by, business has been bad lately, so if you are looking for cash, it will be hard for me to provide it, much as I would like to. Why would I spare it if I had it? At the New Year I can offer you a cotton robe, dyed however you like, and at O-Bon I can give you a bleached Nara hemp robe of middle quality. Is it a deal?" At this request, the old woman replied, "That is what's known as love tainted by greed. What you want from me is something different. I have a powerful means for making people fall in love. Over the years, I've leant my services to thousands of people, and not once did things go badly. I'll bring the two of you together by the time of the Chrysanthemum Festival."<sup>173</sup>

In response to the man's offer of payment in kind, the old woman corrects him: he is speaking in terms of the wrong economy. The service she offers--part of an economy of love (*koi*), not cash--is "something different," something untouched by money, and therefore subject to different conditions of exchange. Her refusal of money is noteworthy, not only in that it remains consistent throughout the story (she is not demurring here simply as a polite formality), but because we are informed that the woman herself barely ekes out a living making noodle flour. Her advertisement-like statement about having one thousand satisfied customers tweaks the play of economies even more: she is giving a hard sell to the cooper on services for which she seeks no monetary reward.

In fact, this contrast between two different economies, one of money and avarice (*yoku*) and one of love (*koi*), is further underlined by the operation of two competing calendars in the timeworld of the story. One is the elegant, celebratory, aesthetically charged calendar of the five yearly festivals (*go sekku*) that structure the economy of love in the story. The conversation

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<sup>173</sup> Ihara Saikaku, *Kōshoku gonin onna*, in Teruoka Yasutaka and Higashi Akimasa, eds., *Ihara Saikaku shū 1: Kōshoku ichidai otoko, Kōshoku gonin onna, Kōshoku ichidai onna*, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 66 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1996), 284.

quoted above takes place on Tanabata (a festival day inspired by a tale of union between two lovers), and in it the woman promises the cooper she will bring him together with Osen by the Chrysanthemum Festival, the next festival in the cycle. The other calendar is the contract service calendar, which in the Edo period marked the "replacement" (*dekawari*) dates on which annual and semi-annual domestic service contracts began and ended, and which is appropriately associated in the story with the money economy. This calendar is also explicitly linked in Saikaku's language with Kyūshichi, a somewhat wealthier rival for Osen's love, who tries and fails to win her through recourse to gifts of money and presents. The link between Kyūshichi and the service calendar marks him as a character who does not perceive the separate nature of the economies of money and desire, foolishly believing that love can indeed be bought.

### **Sleeping with the Enemy: The Gendered Price of Vengeance**

The narrative potential of the clash of economies described above is notably rich in Saikaku's warrior works, which necessarily introduce yet another economy: that of samurai morality. This is particularly true in *Transmission of the Martial Way*, in which every narrative includes a vendetta; vendetta itself is, after all, structured by a highly particular logic of exchanges, involving the reciprocal parent-and-child order of filial piety and the death-for-death equivalence of revenge. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the presence of a vendetta in a narrative also has the effect of infusing the details of the story with a life-or-death moral charge, forcing into dramatic relief implications and contradictions that might otherwise lie dormant. This "vendetta effect" is therefore a potent force for throwing monetary, erotic, and moral economies into dramatic encounter and conflict. Perhaps nowhere in *Transmission* is this



dynamic more in evidence than in narratives in which urban working women are major characters, as such stories allow Saikaku to bring together the monetary economy in which the women work, the licentious morality with which they are charged in popular discourse, and the strict moral economy that undergirds samurai vendetta practice.

Lower-class working women do indeed appear throughout *Transmission of the Martial Way*, sometimes as subsidiary characters, and at other times at center stage. The narrative alluded to at the opening to this chapter, "A Woman Can Write in a Man's Hand" (*Onna no tsukureru otoko moji*), is striking in that both the initial victim and the avenger are working women. Specifically, they are contract concubines, performing a type of labor that combines domestic and sexual service; such concubines were hired according to the contract service calendar, serving in their employer's bed on six-month renewable contracts, either for the employer's sexual pleasure or to help produce an heir for the employer's household. They are thus potent figures for the moral anxiety that attends the urban working woman in 17th century Japan, as their labor is defined by the exchange of the sexualized body for money, but also falls into the category of domestic service, distinct from the sexual labor of the pleasure quarters.

The narrative opens in the mansion of a high-ranking, seventy-year-old Kyoto samurai who has abandoned his formal duties, adopted the name Zuimu ("Dream-follower"), and given himself over wholly to sensual pleasure, populating his chambers with hired concubines whom he names after chapters from the *Tale of Genji*. Indeed, in lush, richly allusive language with which the text depicts life within the mansion, the narrator suggests that Zuimu fancies himself a latter-day Genji or Emperor Xuanzong, a powerful lover with a private harem of beauties. Already we can see a potentially dangerous slippage between two orders: while he imagines

himself as a figure of romance, for the women of the household, Zuimu is nothing more than an employer. They are in fact relieved when he begins to devote all of his affections to one of them in particular, a beautiful young woman named Ichihashi. Ichihashi's origins are actually quite humble:

この親里は、伏見の片陰に、詫住みして、佐脇玄丹といへる、目医者 of 娘なりしが、艶女に生れ付、見し人、なづみふかし。はや十七なれ共、縁付このまず、親の不自由を見かね。折ふし此屋敷、美女尋ね給ひしを、幸に、当分百両請取、金子に身を捨、御妾者といはれしも、父母のためなれば、是更に口惜からず、只御主のお気に入事を、わすれずして、勤めける心から。随夢又もなく、御寵愛あそばし、朝暮、御寝間にめされ...

As for her real home, she was the daughter of an eye doctor named Sawaki Gentan, who lived in a poor dwelling in a dim corner of Fushimi. She was a naturally beautiful woman, and all who saw her felt deeply attracted to her, but although she was already seventeen, she had no interest in marriage and only felt concern for the troubles of her parents. It happened that at that time [Zuimu's] mansion was seeking beautiful women, and thinking this a fortunate opportunity, she accepted an advance payment of one hundred *ryō*, sacrificed her body for the sake of money, and became a concubine. Because it was all for her parents, she felt no regrets, but worked with a heart that endeavored to please her employer. Zuimu showed her exceptional favor, and summoned her to his bedchamber morning and night...<sup>174</sup>

The narrator's language undergoes a shift in this passage, moving from the poetically allusive language used to describe Zuimu's mansion to a more plainspoken, matter-of-fact idiom, which underscores the fact that for Ichihashi, serving Zuimu--including indulging his romantic fantasies--is a matter of sheer practicality. "She sacrificed her body for money"--the language does not leave much room for misinterpretation. Yet in this brief passage Saikaku has already given a sharp tweak to the popular perception of the moral standards of the contract concubine, by taking this morally contentious use of the female body, and placing it in the service of

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<sup>174</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 169.

explicitly virtuous goals. Ichihashi matter-of-factly exchanges her body for money, but from another perspective, she is a moral exemplar: a filial daughter, one whose beautiful body happens to grant her the *agency* to aid her parents through the sexual labor economy. Her body is a contentious site: used for sex, exchanged for money, and willingly offered up to a moral purpose. Within the figure of that body, the text has already established a vertiginous collision course among different economies--monetary, moral, and libidinous. Their moment of impact will prove deadly.

That moment comes in Saikaku's reworking of the brutal Issetsu narrative of the samurai with the severed fingers with which this chapter opened. None of Zuimu's other women begrudge Ichihashi her favored status--except one, a lonely woman named Usugumo. She concocts a plan to undermine Ichihashi: imitating a man's handwriting, she composes love letters addressed to Ichihashi and leaves them lying about the mansion. Zuimu spots one and orders an investigation; the woman charged with looking into it quickly concludes that the letters are fake. Yet Zuimu is not convinced:

中／＼存ぢの外なる、御機嫌、「其女を、八塩紅葉の広庭に、まはせ」との仰せにまかせ、女中間のうたてや、一橋を引立出るより、「いかなるうきめやらん」と、色をうしなひ泪ぐみ、人々の足もとも定めかね、身をふるはせけるに、一橋、すこしもさはぎなく、常よりうるはしき臑ばせして、おそれずゆたかに座して、旦那御出を待うちにも、「哀ことしのうき秋、色にそまれる紅葉も、科なければ、枝は折れじ、それにも、心なき風には、しらず」と、身によせて、無常を觀ずる所へ、隨夢、立出させ給ひ、「其女、丸裸に」と、御言葉かゝる。迷惑ながら、金天天鵝絨の後帯に、各手をかけて、色はへたる袖妻を、まくりとれば、うつくしき肌に、折からの嵐あたりて、くれなひの恥かくし、ひとへのありさま。主命ながら、「さりとはむごき御しかたなり」と、いづれも身をちぢめける。一橋、「世にながらへて、かひのなき事なれ共、つみなき身の程、人にしらせて後、何か命を惜からじ」と、無念のしばしをのがれ、身の因果を觀念の時、

「汝にかくし男なくは、諸神誓文に、五つの指の爪、自はなて」とあれば、是非もなき糺命なれども、其まゝ切刻み、血は真紅の糸をみだし、ひとつ／＼と数算て、はなちけるさへ、目もやれざりしに、なを心づよくも、「指を切」と有りし時、「いかに命がをしきとて、其身になりては何かせんなし。さりとは／＼畜生にはおとれり。此一念、外にはゆかじ。心まかせに」と首さしのべしを、手うちになして、面影の美花、ちる思ひをなして、皆々、なき跡を吊ひ、からだは鳥辺山の灰とはなりぬ。

[The master's] mood was different from what she expected. "Bring that woman to the broad courtyard of the red maple leaves," he said, and how wretched the women of the household felt as they followed his order and brought out Ichihashi. Wondering what kind of bitter treatment she would face, the color drained from their faces and their eyes filled with tears. The women's steps became unsteady and their bodies trembled, but Ichihashi remained completely composed. Her face appeared even lovelier than usual, and she sat fearless and at ease, calmly awaiting the arrival of the master, and thinking to herself, "Ah, the leaves of this garden, dyed with the color of this year's melancholy autumn, have committed no crime, and so their branches should not be snapped. And yet the heartless wind does not know..." And as that wind touched her body, giving her an understanding of impermanence, Zuimu appeared. "Strip that woman naked," he uttered, and, consternated though they felt, they laid their hands on [Ichihashi's] sash of gold velvet, tied in the back, and grabbing her sleeves and hems, pulled off her brilliantly colored robes, exposing her beautiful skin to a sudden gust of wind that tinged it crimson as she blushed with shame. At the sight of her scarlet underskirt and unlined undergarments the women thought that it was a cruel treatment, even if it was the master's order, and each of them shrank back.

Ichihashi thought, "It is of no use for me to go on living in this world. However, I am guiltless. Having informed others of my innocence, there is no need for me to hold my life dear." Leaving behind her chagrin, she now resigned herself to her karma. Zuimu said, "If you do not have a secret lover, make a pledge to the gods, and then with your own hand, pull out the nails of your five fingers." It was a truly excessive form of interrogation, and yet without hesitation Ichihashi cut into them. The deep scarlet threads of blood ran wildly as she counted off the nails one by one, but even once she had ripped them out, [Zuimu] cast her not even a glance. He simply said in a firm voice, "Now cut off your finger."

At that, Ichihashi said, "No matter how much I valued my life, there would be no point in living after that. Well, well, you really are lower than a beast. My resentment will follow you everywhere. Do what you will." She extended her neck, and he cut off her head. To

those present it was as though the beautiful blossom of her face had fallen. They all prayed for her repose, and took her body to Toribeyama, where it turned to ashes.<sup>175</sup>

This strikingly violent scene is remarkable--not only for its violence, but for the verbal artistry with which it brings to life the deadly incompatibility between Zuimu's vision of aestheticized, romantic fantasy, the marketplace reality of the women whose labor enables that fantasy, and the deadly power politics that obtain between a powerful samurai and the members of his household. Color--specifically the color red--performs complicated work in this passage. The word "color" itself, *iro*, with its erotic connotations, is repeated three times in these lines, subtly underscoring the fact that the composition of the entire, savage scene is inflected with both aesthetic beauty and an erotic charge, reflecting Zuimu's sexually obsessed and indulgent mindset. Indeed, in the associations between the beautiful deep red of the maple leaves, the red tinge of Ichihashi's naked flesh, the red of her exposed underskirts, and the red blood that pours forth from her fingers, we are invited to observe the scene from multiple perspectives simultaneously: to see it through the shocked eyes of Zuimu's ladies, for whom it evokes horror and terrified empathy (marked by their paleness and tears), and through the eyes of Zuimu, morally corrupted by erotic and aesthetic indulgence (*iro*). At the same time, Ichihashi, the hired concubine from a poor corner of run-down Fushimi, experiences the brilliant red of the autumn garden--and the impending fate she sees written there--with a poetic sensitivity that marks her own depth of character, elevating her as not only a highly sympathetic, but an impressive figure.

This overlapping of perspectives and meanings acquires a new dimension in Zuimu's specific demand of pledges from Ichihashi. These are not the cruel whims of one man's sadistic imagination; they are a specific set of practices known as *shinjū*, which are described in detail in

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<sup>175</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 170-171.

the *shinjū* chapter of Fujimoto Kizan's encyclopedic work *The Great Mirror of the Way of Love*, mentioned above.<sup>176</sup> *Shinjū* (literally, "within the heart") practices are intended to demonstrate to a patron that a courtesan's heart is true, despite the fact that she shares her body with many men. The acts proceed along a scale of extremes, involving various mutilations that are meant to bear physical witness, upon the body and in the increasing endurance of pain, to the feelings in the courtesan's heart. According to Kizan, the ultimate *shinjū* act is that of severing a finger, which, he argues, is the most difficult to perform with a false heart, precisely because it is the most permanent:

爪は日を経てのぶる。髪は月を経てのぶる。誓紙は人これを見ず。[黥]不會となれば、是を解してかたちなし。指ばかりこそ、生涯のうちかたわとなり、昔にかへらざ[る]。

Fingernails begin to grow back in a day; hair grows back in a month. No one sees an oath, and if things turn sour a tattoo can be erased. Severing a finger, however, renders one deformed for life, since the finger never grows back.<sup>177</sup>

Ichihashi's body has become a battleground upon which different orders of exchange are thrown into contest. She had earlier exchanged her body for money, for a moral purpose; now Zuimu demands a very different kind of exchange, instructing her to mark that body permanently, to transform it into an outward representation of the feelings it contains within, in her heart. He does so, moreover, not simply as an employer, but as a samurai master, reserving the privilege to use his sword to mete out punishments of life and death. In the *Great Mirror*, Kizan emphasizes that the exchange represented by *shinjū* acts should not involve compulsion--they are supposed to be natural, unforced manifestations of a courtesan's true feelings. Here, samurai authority and

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<sup>176</sup> For an extensive examination of *shinjū* practices and their description in the *Great Mirror of the Way of Love*, see Lawrence Rogers, "She Loves Me, She Loves Me Not: *Shinjū* and *Shikidō Ōkagami*," *Monumenta Nipponica* 49, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 31-60.

<sup>177</sup> Fujimoto Kizan, *Shinpan Shikidō ōkagami*, 219.

the practices of the pleasure quarters have been pushed into a twisted overlap that underscores the moral perversion of Zuimu's demands. Moreover:

此しるしを用ひ来る事、傾城の所業にして、外女に用ひざる處なり。

The employment of these practices is the act of the courtesan; other women do not use them.<sup>178</sup>

There is thus another slippage between worlds taking place in this scene: as a concubine, Ichihashi exchanges her body for money, but she does so on a contract basis, with agency over her body, and the ability to leave when the next replacement date rolls around--different from the long-term indentured servitude of the courtesans of the pleasure quarters. Even if there are resemblances between concubines and courtesans in the economy of sexual labor, the two are not interchangeable, and the brutal acts that Zuimu compels from Ichihashi are not appropriate to her status as concubine.

It therefore makes sense that the narrative represents Ichihashi as flying into a rage at this last of Zuimu's demands. Among all of them, this one alone would cause her permanently to relinquish full control over her body and its meaning. The severed finger would be a permanent inscription upon the text of her body, causing it to proclaim a love for Zuimu she has never felt in her heart, and thereby transferring her body's relationship to Zuimu from a money economy to a different economy of love and desire. However, this inscription would also mark her for life as a different kind of laborer, one she has never been: a courtesan. We may recall that this scene rewrites the narrative by Issetsu quoted at the opening of this chapter, in which it is a samurai who loses his fingers as punishment, curses his master, and is executed. We can thus witness Saikaku playing with questions of exchange and translation even at the level of adaptation in his

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 207.

writing process, exploring the different consequences that emerge when a samurai is switched out for a concubine, a male retainer for a female lover-employee.<sup>179</sup> A samurai with no fingers is rendered "useless" in Issetsu's narrative, presumably because of the practical matter that he can no longer hold a sword; the implications for a morally and sexually contested female body like Ichihashi's are more complicated, connected as they are in this narrative to a broader set of overlapping and contradictory significations.

These tensions and contestations at the level of the commodified female body receive some resolution in the second half of the story, which follows the actions of Ichihashi's beautiful younger sister Kogin as she sets out to achieve vengeance for her slain sister. The components of virtue, desire, capital, and agency now congregate upon the body of Kogin, who dramatically utilizes her body to achieve revenge for Ichihashi's death. In fact, Kogin undergoes a significant transformation in the wake of Ichihashi's killing by Zuimu. Prior to Ichihashi's death, she had been seduced by a young Shinto priest, run away from home, and given herself over to a life of sexual indulgence:

それよりは、伏見へも音信絶て久敷、親の事も、姉の事も忘れて、明暮、つれそふ男かはゆがりて、世をいたづらに身をなし、「是より何をかたのしみ」と思ふ。

After that, she sent no word to Fushimi for a long time, forgetting her parents and her older sister. Morning and night she was doted on by her man, ignoring the world, fooling about, and wondering what could be more enjoyable than this.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Saikaku appears to hint at this gender switch in both the plot and the title of the story. The wording of the title (*Onna no tsukureru otoko moji*) appears to draw on the famous opening lines of *Tosa nikki*, in which Ki no Tsurayuki writes in the voice of a woman who announces that she is going to attempt to keep a diary, as she has heard that men do (*Otoko mo sunaru nikki to iu mono o onna mo shite min tote suru nari*). At the same time, the title refers specifically to Usugumo's forged love letters to Ichihashi written in a man's handwriting. And indeed, there is a man haunting this story, in a sense--the executed samurai of Issetsu's narrative, here transformed into the woman Ichihashi.

<sup>180</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 172.



In other words, unlike the morally upright and resourceful Ichihashi, Kogin embodies the image of the sexually available, morally dubious lower class woman of popular discourse: loosed from the surveillance and responsibilities of the household, she is portrayed with a strong sense of personal agency that is directed entirely at sexual enjoyment.<sup>181</sup> News of her sister's death, however, effects a striking change in Kogin. Knowing that her impoverished, ailing parents have no recourse against the powerful Zuimu, she takes matters into her own hands--or, more appropriately, upon her own body. Like Ichihashi earlier, Kogin uses her commodified body for a moral purpose, for the sake of her family; but rather than simply exchanging it for money, she wields it like a weapon, in the service of moral revenge. We thus see yet another striking transaction in the moral economy of the narrative, as the sexually indulgent body of Kogin is transformed--*without* losing its sexualized quality--into a powerful moral instrument, one employed moreover, like Ichihashi's, with an assured sense of agency.

Abandoning her lover, she makes her way to the capital and seeks employ as a domestic servant. Her beauty is outstanding even by Kyoto's standards--a powerful form of capital--and the procurement agents clamor for her services, urging her to "turn your appearance into money" (*kane ni nashi tamae*). Her beauty allows her to be picky: she will accept no job other than one in Zuimu's mansion. Upon meeting her, Zuimu, unaware of her real identity, hires her the spot on the basis of her beauty alone. It is not long before she is called to serve in the master's bedchamber:

心よくうちとけ給ひし折を得て、肌刀にして胸さし通し、「一橋が妹なるぞ。姉の敵」と、つづけざまにとどめさし、其上に腰をかけ、むねつらぬき、身をかた

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<sup>181</sup> The phrase "yo o itazura ni mi o nashi" includes a productive wordplay with the semantic range of "itazura," suggesting both her lack of respect for worldly responsibilities ("yo o itazura") and her indulgence in sexual pleasures ("itazura ni mi o nashi"). See *ibid.*, 172, n. 1.

め、うれしげに笑たる最後、見し人、心ざしをかんじける。女のはたらき、前代  
ためしなき敵うち、今の世迄も語りつたへり。

Once she had Zuimu at his ease, Kogin seized her chance. Pulling a dagger out from her clothes, she stabbed Zuimu through the chest, shouting, 'I am Ichihashi's younger sister. You are my sister's enemy!' She quickly delivered the fatal blow, then seated herself upon Zuimu's corpse, pierced her own breast, and carefully arranged her appearance before drawing her final breath. All who saw the happy smile on her corpse understood the tremendous resolve in her heart. The actions of this woman, and her vendetta--a kind unheard of in previous ages--are still spoken of today.<sup>182</sup>

If Kogin's body is a weapon, she wields it like a master. Ichihashi's body is constructed as a contested site upon which different meanings come into violent conflict; by contrast, Kogin's body ultimately remains firmly under her own control, even if other characters attempt to project different meanings onto it along the way. It is her sexualized, attractive, commodified body that provides her the means to infiltrate her enemy's household, via the domestic service marketplace, and to obtain access to him when he is off his guard. Whereas Zuimu had attempted permanently to alter the meaning of Ichihashi's body, Kogin's control over her own body is so secure that she possesses the wherewithal to carefully arrange her appearance even *after* stabbing herself. This attention to her appearance is not a matter of vanity. Zuimu had once attempted to alter the text of her sister's body; now, sitting atop Zuimu's corpse, she constructs her own body as a text that not only communicates what transpired in the bedchamber, but also attests to her perfect control over the entire event and--in her smile--conveys her feelings about it.

"The actions of this woman, and her vendetta--a kind unheard of in previous ages--are still spoken of today": as this final narratorial comment suggests, Kogin the morally dubious, sexually indulgent, lower-class working woman has been constructed here as a figure of moral

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<sup>182</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 174.

exemplarity. Moreover (and here again we see the clash of economies, the question of where and how certain values can be successfully exchanged), Kogin's exemplarity is crafted *precisely* from the elements underlying contemporary moral anxiety about the lower-class working woman. She possesses a strong sense of agency, and although her revenge is carried out on behalf of her sister, she acts entirely on her own, without the mediation of the household.<sup>183</sup> She treats her sexualized body as a source of capital--but like her older sister she directs that capital to an exemplary moral purpose, translating her body, via the marketplace for contract sexual labor, into a moral weapon. Indeed, this use of her body enables her to carry out the revenge with an efficiency and success that would be unavailable to a male avenger.

Yet a male avenger could expect reward and celebration for the success of his act, while in the story Saikaku has Kogin take her life after killing Zuimu. Why? Her body is her greatest weapon, but as a sexualized female body, it remains a moral liability. She succeeds in killing the enemy by sleeping with the enemy; the suggestion is that only suicide can guarantee the virtuous intention behind this use of her body. The moral economy of revenge allows different opportunities to a woman, but in exchange for them it also exacts a different price. The narrative thus ends with an unresolved tension--typical of Saikaku's work--between two coexistent meanings. The story ends felicitously, with Kogin as triumphant avenger and moral exemplar; yet it also ends tragically, with both sisters dead and, each in her own way, victimized. The narrative unmistakably elevates the figure of the working woman, imbuing her with a powerful moral agency that is absent in broader contemporary discourse. Indeed, it opens up new possibilities within this discourse, through an imaginative recreation of the morally problematic

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<sup>183</sup> The text makes this point explicit: Kogin does not inform her parents of what she is going to do when she embarks on her vendetta.

aspects of the sexualized working woman as moral assets--a gesture ultimately consistent with Saikaku's elevation of courtesans through the relationship between their work and their poetry in his *haikai* anthology, or his depiction of the Amorous Woman as achieving a kind of spiritual awakening *via* the sordid experiences of her life. Yet the representation of Ichihashi and Kogin also points precisely towards the negative, compelling power of popular discourse. For all their independent initiative, resolve, and resourcefulness, the female characters in this story remain at the mercy of forces beyond their complete control--forces determined to define the meanings that attach to their sexual bodies, and that will exact a deadly price when the women insist on defining those meanings for themselves.

### **Sleeping with the Enemy Redux: The Case of the Nameless Woman**

As mentioned earlier, *Transmission of the Martial Way* reads in some ways as a series of contrapuntal variations: details and situations of one of its narratives will often make uncanny reappearances, similar but never quite the same, elsewhere in the collection. At times it seems as though meaning is meant to emerge from these cross-narrative reflections and the productive tension generated by their similarities and differences, rather than only at the level of the isolated story. "Vying Over Smoke at the Field Altar" (*Nozukue no keburu kurabe*), one of the last stories in the collection, is a striking case in point.<sup>184</sup> As with many of the decentered narratives of *Transmission*, this one appears to be split in two: each half of the story--constituting the build-up to the initial killing, and the pursuit and accomplishment of revenge, respectively--seems almost a complete narrative unto itself, with different characters and themes, linked only

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<sup>184</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 230-237.

tenuously by the frame of the vendetta plot. Yet in the second half of the story we see elements that appear to resonate distinctly with the story of Zuimu, Ichihashi, and Kogin; indeed, the same narrative gesture of elevating the morally dubious working woman *via* her dubious qualities is very much in effect, though with grimmer implications.

The first half of the story concerns the events that precipitate the killing of a samurai by his fellow retainer Itani Kyūshirō. The killer goes into hiding, but the victim's two young sons set out to find Kyūshirō's hiding place and avenge their father's death; their search for him comprises the second half of the narrative, which is the focus of my discussion here. Running throughout this second half is an ongoing allusion to the late medieval tale *Akimichi*, in which a male avenger seeking to kill the bandit who murdered his father, instructs his wife to go to the bandit's hideout, seduce him, and continue sleeping with him until she can help her husband discover a way to breach the hideout and kill him. She grudgingly complies, and even bears the enemy a child before the avenger Akimichi succeeds in killing him. We can see the appeal of such a plot conceit for Saikaku, for it hinges on the question of exchange between different moral orders. Can a woman exemplify the virtue of female fidelity through the act of being unfaithful to her husband, if it is at his command, and for a moral purpose? What is the moral status of the sexuality of a woman's body in such extreme and unusual circumstances, and in what ways is it a site upon which male ambitions, fantasies, and desires contend with the agency and will of the woman herself? What happens when the moral expectations that accompany different female identities--lover, wife, mother--come into conflict, with life-or-death consequences, within the figure of a single person?

Saikaku's narrative takes these questions and complicates them further, by replacing the position of the aristocratic wife of the medieval narrative with a lower-class working woman engaged in a distinctly early modern urban economy. In Saikaku's story, the avenging brothers search for their enemy for nine years, before they finally learn that their target is hidden somewhere in the northern castle town of Shōnai. While casing the outskirts of the town disguised as a wandering seller of household goods, the younger brother, Toranosuke, evades a dangerous run-in with a band of drunk swordsmen when a young woman urges him to duck into her dwelling. After catching his breath, Toranosuke takes a look around:

内証を見しに、草ふかき宿ながら、火燵に紬の紫ぶとんをかけて、真綿引矢筈のもとに、伽羅割のなたなどの有しに、何とやらこの女、奥ゆかしく、心を付しに、みよしの染のきる物に、前結びの帯の悪さ、只者とは思はれず。

Although it was a rough dwelling, a purple pongee quilt was draped over the sunken hearth, and next to a notched implement used for pulling floss silk lay a small blade for cutting *kyara* incense wood. Clearly this was a woman of some refinement. When he turned his attention to her he saw that she was wearing a splashed-pattern kimono speckled with cherry blossoms and wore her *obi* tied alluringly in the front. He could see that she was no ordinary woman.<sup>185</sup>

The reader is encouraged to discern the woman's position in the world by interpreting this description of her dwelling. In the presence of implements used for textile work, and the alluring way she ties her sash in front, the contemporary reader would recognize her as one of the lower-class, urban working women who made their living in textile work as part of the new city-based textile economy that had arisen in the first decades of the Edo period, as discussed above. Saikaku's skillful juxtaposition of key elements--the implements used for textile work listed side-by-side with implements for chopping the erotically suggestive *kyara* incense, for example--

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 233.

evokes the sexual connotations that accompany independent working women in contemporary discourse. The sense of sexual availability is additionally marked upon the body of the woman by the fact that she ties her sash in front, a detail frequently invoked in Saikaku's work to suggest promiscuity.

The woman and Toranosuke begin a romantic dalliance that fully lives up to the sexually loose reputation of the lower-class working woman--soon they are engaged in erotic play in broad daylight, not even ashamed before the aged crone who shares the woman's run-down dwelling. Yet they also begin to speak of their relationship as sharing the “bond of two lifetimes,” a term that usually refers to the relationship between husband and wife. Again we see a collision arising between different economies: is the relationship between Toranosuke and the woman grounded in sexual desire, in the moral bond of matrimony, or in monetary transaction?

The plot thickens when the young woman discovers Toranosuke's true identity and his mission as an avenger. In a scene rich with the sudden tonal reversals of Saikaku's language, the woman playfully searches for a sex toy in the goods box that Toranosuke carries as part of his disguise as a peddler; when she opens the box to discover that it contains nothing but a sword, her playful, coquettish language immediately vanishes, replaced by a voice of deep emotional commitment as she insists that he tell her his true identity:

女の無用なる尋ね事ながら、かりそめながら契りをこめて、子細を聞ではおかれ  
じ。先自が命は、貴様へ参らせ置からは。

These may seem a woman's useless questions, but having pledged myself to you, however fleetingly, I *must* hear the details. Above all, I offer up to you my own life.<sup>186</sup>

The woman is making a request of the man in these lines, but there is a force and drive to her language, which subsumes the fleeting nature of their sexual connection to the affirmation of a

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<sup>186</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 234.

deeper bond between them. The line, moreover, establishes a specific dynamic of exchange between the two of them that will ripple throughout the rest of the story as a question: what does it mean to offer one's life to another human being? If such a gift is proffered freely, as the woman offers it here, can it also be freely recalled when circumstances change?

Toranosuke tells her the truth of his identity, and the woman gives a start of recognition: she knows the mansion where Toranosuke's enemy Kyūshirō is hiding out, and she possesses this knowledge precisely by virtue of her work status. She had earlier applied for work there as a domestic servant, but intimidated by the heavy security (the mansion is highly guarded against any possible vendetta), she refused the job. She quickly concocts a plan:

そなた様に、ふしぎの縁を結びぬ。命を進すべし、と云一言はたがへじ。今に、人置われをしのべば、行先の三月五日より、そこへ奉公に出、みづから手引をして、心任せにうたせ申べし。

Now that I have formed this mysterious bond with you, I cannot go against my word to offer up to you my life. Right now the procuring agent is eager to hire me, so from the fifth of the Third Month, I will go into service there, find a way to lead you in, and then you can cut him down just as your heart desires.<sup>187</sup>

Into these tight lines, Saikaku weaves language that touches upon all of the competing economies already at play in the story: economies of love ("this mysterious bond"), of obligation ("offer up to you my life"), of filial virtue ("cut him down just as your heart desires"), and of commodity exchange ("the procuring agent is eager to hire me"). In the tale of the barrel maker and Osen from *Five Amorous Women* discussed above, the "replacement day" of the domestic service contract calendar marked a monetary timeworld inimical to the timeworld of romantic love; here it marks the spot ("the fifth of the Third Month") where the competing economies of the narrative are bound together into a volatile tangle.

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<sup>187</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 235.



In the medieval tale, Akimichi uses his wife's beauty as a weapon to infiltrate his enemy's hideout. In Saikaku's version, the enterprising young working woman comes up with the plan on her own. Like Ichihashi and Kogin, she is imbued with a remarkable sense of agency; also like them, she knows how to use the commodified status of her body in the urban labor market to achieve her moral aims. She can obtain access to Kyūshirō's heavily guarded mansion--which is guarded against male avengers--as a female domestic servant. Her imagination of the plan is rooted in her awareness of her own status as a commodity: the procurement agent has been seeking her out, knowing that her beauty and allure will earn a good fee for her placement as a household worker. Indeed, this is almost a precise repeat of the scenario of Kogin in the previous story, who also manipulates the procurement market with her appearance for the purpose of achieving a vendetta, except that in this case the woman is using her morally contentious body to aid a vendetta, not embarking upon one herself.

Indeed, the narrative is very concerned with the matter of the woman's body, which she employs strategically in both manual and sexual labor to make her way in the world. Repeatedly the language of the narration draws an explicit contrast between her body (*mi*) and her heart (*kokoro*). Toranosuke refers to her willingness to infiltrate his enemy's hideout on his behalf as an act of "exchanging her body" (*mi o kaete no kokorozashi*) for his. Soon the issue of the body becomes even more fraught: the woman finds herself employed not only in the enemy's household, but specifically in his bedchamber, and then in his bed, occupying the position of a contracted concubine--the same conflation of domestic and sexual labor engaged in by Ichihashi and Kogin. There are similarities between the stories even in small details: the enemy in whose bed she serves has now adopted the name Muraku (Dream-Pleasure), evoking clear resonances

with the enemy Zuimu (Dream-Follower) from the previous story:

銀百五拾目に極め、表向の女郎分に出しに、思ひの外なる事になりて、夢楽御内証に引こまれて、心にもあらぬ枕物語、是非もなき事ながら、是皆、虎之助様と申かはせし為なれば、迎も身は捨物にして、御機嫌に入ける。

Her payment was settled at one hundred and fifty monme, and she entered the household as a servant in the front quarters, but quite unexpectedly she was taken into Muraku's private chambers and soon found herself, without wishing it in her heart, engaged in pillow talk. There was nothing she could do about it, and since all of this was because of the pledge she had made to Toranosuke, she treated her body as something to be thrown away and did her best to please [Muraku].<sup>188</sup>

The wording closely resembles that quoted earlier regarding Ichihashi's entry into Zuimu's household: again a price is named, again the woman decides to "throw her body away" for the sake of a moral purpose, and does her best to please her employer. The scenario, however, has been tweaked; Ichihashi "threw away" her body for the sake of her impoverished parents; this woman does so on behalf of a man to whom she has pledged her heart and fidelity. A tension is thus established between the woman's body and her heart. Her body is an economic asset but a moral liability; she tells herself that she can sacrifice her body and still remain faithful to Toranosuke provided she sacrifices it on his behalf, with him in her heart. The story provokes the question of where female morality ultimately lies: in the body, in the realm of the emotions, or in the way a woman chooses to exercise the agency she possesses in relation to these parts of herself.

The story highlights this question, moreover, while making a series of subtle rhetorical moves that transform the reader's relationship to the woman. When we are first introduced to her, we meet her as an object: we see her through the eyes of Toranosuke as he looks around her

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<sup>188</sup> *Budō denraiki*, 235.

dwelling, reading her dress (her front-tied sash) and possessions (textile implements and *kyara* incense) as a text that suggests to us her social, sexual, and moral status. Yet once she is employed in the enemy's household and in the fraught situation of actually serving in his bed, the locus of the narration itself moves from her body inward, to her heart, and we as readers are given increasing access to her thoughts, as in the quotation above--thoughts she shares with no one within the narrative, not even her beloved Toranosuke. The result is that the woman becomes the most vivid character in the story, the one with whom the reader becomes most intimate, and who elicits the reader's sympathies. We suddenly find ourselves her confidant as she undergoes a tremendous crisis. The crisis is rooted in the specificity of the female body, and it has implications for the female heart:

女の身は是非もなく、つゐに懐胎して、物思ふうちに、月かさなりて、男子を安産しけるに、うき中にも、子といふものの不便にて、此女捨がたくなりて、「けふよりは、それがしが奥さまなり」と、あまたの女に言葉をなをさせ、さりとては、御恩忘れがたき御仕かたなれば、心も乱れかゝりて、「虎之助事を夢楽にかたり、反り討にさせん」と、女心のはかなき時、「扱も口惜や、一たび虎之助どのと申かはし、今また、栄花に思ひ替事なかれ」と心底をかためける。

Because her body was a woman's, it couldn't be helped: she ended up getting pregnant. While still lost in her thoughts, the months piled up, and she safely delivered a boy. In this midst of all his troubles, the child seemed quite pitiful [to Muraku], who now found it difficult to part with the woman. 'From this day forward, you are the lady of the house,' he said, and he had all the women [of the household] adjust their speech to her accordingly. Well, this truly was a gesture of kindness impossible to forget. The woman's heart was thrown into confusion. 'I could tell Muraku about Toranosuke and have him cut down,' she thought, with a woman's fickle heart. 'Ah but how mortifying! Having once pledged myself to Toranosuke, I must not exchange my feelings just because I have come into such favorable circumstances.' She stiffened the resolve in her heart.<sup>189</sup>

This is a striking passage, at multiple levels. Impossible to convey in English is the way the

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 236.

original slips almost imperceptibly in its first phrases from the woman's perspective to Muraku's, hinting at the bond that is growing between them, aligning their perspectives via the figure of the child they have created together. The passage also gives the woman the only "name" she will have in the narrative besides "woman" (*onna*): by insisting that the other women now refer to her as "the lady of the house" (*okusama*), Muraku signals that he now considers her his proper wife and the mother of his heir. The morally dubious working woman suddenly finds herself the proper wife in a samurai household, the epitome of respectability. This passage gives us intimate access to her inner thoughts as she struggles with this turn of events. The sense of agency that has thus far characterized her as a strong, independent figure here reaches a certain extreme: understanding her own fate as something truly in her own hands, she contemplates betraying the life of her lover Toranosuke (the man to whom she once promised her own life), happily accepting the good fortune that has come to her, and living the rest of her life in peace and respectability with her child's father Muraku. Yet the narrator also gives this moment of startling independence a negative, and specifically gendered charge, marking it as a moment of fickleness in her "woman's heart" (*onnagokoro hakanaki toki*). The entire passage, in fact, traces a series of transformations undergone by her heart, which moves from confusion ("*kokoro midare kakarite*") to fickleness ("*onnagokoro hakanaki toki*"), and finally to resolve ("*shintei o katamekeru*"). Once again, the lower-class working woman, the source of so much moral anxiety in the early modern period, in Saikaku's story proves herself morally steadfast. She does so here with striking adherence to principle. In the previous story, Ichihashi and Kogin both turn their bodies to a moral purpose for deeply personal reasons: Ichihashi to support her parents, and Kogin to avenge her sister. This woman sacrifices husband, child, and status for the sake of upholding a

pledge made to a man with whom she engaged, now many months before, in a romantic affair, for the purpose of helping him achieve a vendetta that has no direct connection to her at all. Again, questions of exchange are pushed to dramatic extremes: at what point does adherence to a promise outweigh one's responsibilities as a mother, for example, or outweigh the repayment of tremendous kindness (*on*)? Wherein does the virtue of female fidelity ultimately lie? This strong-willed determination by a woman to sacrifice her own happiness to the principle of fidelity is even more at odds with the popular perception of lower-class working women than the women in the previous story; the questions she faces are also harder. It is perhaps for that reason that this woman must pay, in a sense, an even greater price.

Soon she learns of an opportunity for Toranosuke to strike. Muraku will pay a visit to a local temple, hidden in a chest filled with Buddhist implements being delivered to the monks there. Having been tipped off by the woman, the avenging brothers hide their weapons in a cart filled with radishes and then ambush him on the road, successfully completing their vendetta without a hitch. The woman then suddenly appears on the scene:

なげく事なげかず、はじめの段々をかたり、「此子も、我はらはかし物」と、其まゝさしころし、其手にてじがいして、目前の落花とはなりぬ。此女しかた、おしまぬ人はなかりき。

She showed no grief over the grievous scene, but explained everything from the beginning. Then she said, 'As for this child, mine was only a borrowed womb,' and just like that she stabbed it to death, and with the same hand took her own life, like a flower falling before everyone's eyes. There was not a single person who was not moved by her actions.<sup>190</sup>

These final acts of the woman demonstrate the steep price she must ultimately pay to maintain her moral standing--a bind unique to her status as a woman. She disavows her connection to her

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 237.

own child with the words “mine was only a borrowed womb” (*waga hara wa kashimono*), an expression that refers to her status as a contractually hired concubine--a reproductive laborer--one who exchanges her body for money to produce a child for a person to whom she has no personal, lasting, or emotional relationship. She then turns the weapon *upon* her own body, symbolically punishing herself for having been unfaithful in body to her lover Toranosuke, even if she was faithful to him throughout in her heart and in the difficult choices she made in his favor. The reader, having become familiar with the inner thoughts and emotions of the woman, is thus in a unique position to question the justice of her fate, a fate that--through its violence--establishes her moral steadfastness in the eyes of all onlookers within the story; the appropriateness of sympathizing with her in her plight is, indeed, reinforced by the audience within the story that hears and is moved by her words and actions.<sup>191</sup>

The question of justice is underscored by the final line of the tale, which informs us that Toranosuke's older brother and fellow avenger, Ryūnosuke, returned to his home province, having cleansed his murdered father's name of its shame. Toranosuke, however, lost in thoughts of his love and her sacrifice, becomes a monk and spends the rest of his days praying for the woman's repose. In this grimly ironic story, not only is the morally dubious woman ultimately doomed by her own moral uprightness, but despite her highly positive and active role--she is the one who first invites Toranosuke inside, she is the one who concocts the plan to infiltrate Kyūshirō's hideout, she is the one who makes the decision to preserve Toranosuke's life and sacrifice Muraku's, her child's, and her own--she ultimately remains invisible within the public

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<sup>191</sup> In the medieval tale *Akimichi*, the avenger Akimichi's wife becomes a nun after the success of his vendetta; her son, fathered by the enemy, becomes the heir to Akimichi's household when he follows her in taking the tonsure. Saikaku, drawing on the frame of the Akimichi story, gives his tale a much darker and more violent ending, one that pushes the moral contradictions drawn out by the narrative to an even greater extreme.

perception of the moral vendetta. The older brother can return to be celebrated as a great filial avenger in his home province, simply for the act of having killed his father's murderer; the fact that he could not have succeeded without the actions and tremendous sacrifice of a lower-class woman, the lover of his brother, is immaterial. As though to underscore her highly ambiguous, even invisible--and thereby quite challenging--role in the entire narrative, Saikaku keeps her anonymous: with the sole exception of the moment when she becomes the "lady of the house" (*okusama*), throughout the story she is referred to simply as "the woman" (*onna*).

The reader, having been addressed by the text in a way that encourages sympathy for "the woman," and having confronted both the workings of her "woman's heart," and the power and consequences of her "woman's body," is in a position to reconsider any pat assumptions he may have harbored about the moral status of the urban working woman and her sexuality. At the same time, the narrative asks the question of what a woman's relationship to her body is in an urban economy in which that body itself circulates as a commodity, performing both productive and reproductive labor on a contract or subcontracted basis, and uncoupled from the familial relationships--to parents and to husband--that order the values of Confucian moral ideology such as filial piety and female chastity. Throughout the story there seems to be a subtext about the moral meanings concealed within commercial goods. A peddler's box is opened to reveal an avenging sword, the weapons of filial justice are concealed in a cart of radishes, a murderer is hidden in a delivery of Buddhist implements. There is a productive tension in these images. Goods, after all, are simply goods: they do not abide by moral human relationships, and they do not discern between justice and villainy. Money is an extremely powerful force, but its power is by no means oriented towards the reward of virtue; here, skills the woman usually employs for

economic ends are put to use in the service of a moral mission, with deadly results for her.

## Conclusion

Saikaku is writing at a moment when, among the many modernizations of the early modern period, the growth of the monetary economy was having an ever more dramatic impact on human relationships, particularly in the rapidly growing cities. This was an economy that operated according to forces and logic distinct from those that structured moral models of personhood and community, undergirded as they were with their own conceptions of value and exchange; the growth of the urban market economy necessarily produced disruptions in the social order and its moral ideology. In the narratives I have examined here, Saikaku--in whose fiction questions of conflict and transposition among different "economies" is a persistent animating force--constructs stories that draw attention to the rich tensions between the logic of the market and the order of moral discourse. Few figures exemplify those tensions in Saikaku's late 17th century moment more powerfully than the working woman, whose body can be viewed as a commodity, something to be paid for, "turned into money," "borrowed," or "thrown away," but who is also a human being, possessing agency, thoughts, and emotions--a heart, a moral center concealed within the commodified body. Taking questions of moral exchange that we see already in medieval literature--can a woman sacrifice her chastity to a virtuous cause and remain virtuous? can her sacrifice be exchanged for a man's virtuous accomplishment?--and rewriting them into stories that play out within a new context for the exchange of goods and capital, Saikaku explores what it means to be a human being--and specifically a woman--in a world in which the market plays a role increasingly disruptive to the relationships that structure traditional



moral ideology.

Vendetta, which involves its own logic of value, exchange, and equivalence, proves a powerful vehicle for drawing out these tensions and contradictions between the monetary and the moral. In the hands of a master of language as skilled as Saikaku, it becomes a fertile framework for rethinking discourses that extend far beyond the issue of revenge itself, in this case creating new possibilities for the moral imagination of female labor in an urban economy. As I have suggested in this chapter, Ihara Saikaku is a highly idiosyncratic author, and in his hands the topos of vendetta is highly plastic. In the latter half of the Edo period, by contrast, vendetta fiction would become increasingly conventionalized and formulaic. Nonetheless, as we shall see in the following chapter, the formulae of late Edo vendetta works would prove no less potent in drawing out the repressions and contradictions of broader contexts and moral discourses than the Saikaku narratives discussed here.

## Chapter Four:

### **Virtue, Villainy, Victimization, Vengeance: The Melodramatic Ethics and Aesthetics of *Gesaku* Revenge Fiction**

Bloodshed, murder, cliffhangers and improbable rescues: at the turn of the 19th century these elements so dominated the world of Japanese popular fiction that the writer Shikitei Sanba (1776-1822) griped that an author had to rack his brains to come up with new villains, narrow escapes, and ways of killing people. Sanba felt that popular fiction, or *gesaku* (literally, “playful writings”) had strayed from its roots, which he thought of as a spirit of play, wit, sophistication and satire that had pervaded the popular print world of the preceding decades. Yet even as he grumbled, he churned out works in the new, darker mode, helping to meet the demand of the print marketplace. These were primarily vendetta works, stories of filial children and loyal siblings in pursuit of vengeance on behalf of a murdered family member. In the last decade of the 18th century and the first decade of the 19th, vendetta works came to dominate the world of popular fiction, and most *gesaku* writers tried their hand at it. In the modern period these works have met with a critical reception not much different from Sanba’s disdainful opinion--and indeed, they are formulaic and bloody, populated with starkly differentiated heroes and villains who exhibit little in the way of individual character or inner complexity, and structured by highly improbable plots featuring barely believable turns and reversals, before arriving at an inevitably happy end. Yet these works enjoyed tremendous popularity in their time, and they established the groundwork of a moral-aesthetic mode that would continue to pervade major genres of *gesaku*, in ever more complex permutations, long after the specific fad for revenge narratives had died away. In this chapter, rather than dismissing these works and the mode that animates them as

formulaic, I seek to understand what their formula makes possible.<sup>192</sup> What can typological, morally charged characters and relentlessly repetitive plots provide that more nuanced treatments--even of the same theme of revenge--cannot? Or to put it another way, what moral world does this mode construct, and what might be its appeal--its power?

I answer these questions by arguing that the mode that takes shape in these popular vendetta works is one we must understand as fundamentally melodramatic, as melodrama has been theorized in literature and film studies of the past four decades.<sup>193</sup> Peter Brooks has argued that melodrama is “not only a moralistic drama but the drama of morality: it strives to find, to articulate, to demonstrate, and to ‘prove’ the existence of a moral universe which, though put into question, masked by villainy and perversions of judgment, does exist and can be made to assert its presence and its categorical force among men.”<sup>194</sup> It brings forth, through its excesses and reliance upon hyperbolic, gestural articulation, a legible moral order that can be perceived and comprehended. We find this dynamic vitally at play in the works I discuss here. These works are dramas of virtue, in which virtue is threatened and victimized by villainy, but finally succeeds--in this case through the act of vengeance--in expelling villainy from the human moral order, achieving recognition and affirmation in the process. This drama of virtue plays out in large part at the level of the immediate family, within which the typological characters render fundamental family positions and relations (Father, Son, Mother, Brother, Wife) radically visible, allowing the

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<sup>192</sup> In adopting this approach to the texts, I am indebted to conversations about this material and its challenges with Yumi Kim, who also provided generous and insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

<sup>193</sup> I have drawn in particular on the work of Peter Brooks, Linda Williams, Laura Mulvey, Thomas Elsaesser, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Christine Gledhill, and Ben Singer, whose works I will reference specifically throughout the following discussion.

<sup>194</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 20.

moral implications and consequences of their dynamic interaction to be legibly discerned, as the family faces crisis after crisis across text after text. At stake in this morally legible vision of human relationships--in both their moral power and their contradictoriness, which is also rendered visible--is the vision of ideal human community that pervaded moral discourse and social ideology of the late Edo period, a vision rooted in fundamental family relationships and the virtues they embody, such as filial piety, brotherhood, and female fidelity. *Gesaku's* melodramatic mode, which depicts the community of the virtuous family under extreme pressure from villainy and violence, constitutes a space wherein the repressions and contradictions involved in the ideology of the harmonious human community can achieve dramatic expression, and equally dramatic (if also fantastic and ultimately impossible) resolution, allowing virtue to continue its trajectory towards ultimate recognition and reward even as its repressed underside is temporarily exposed.

In the pages that follow I will trace the shape of this melodramatic mode as it crystallizes in the popular vendetta fiction of the turn of the 19th century, exploring its aesthetics of virtue, villainy, and victimization, and its representations of the morally charged family. I will then examine the ways in which this mode converses with a broader world of moral discourse, particularly the politically charged moral ideology actively propagated at this time by the Tokugawa shogunate. I conclude by considering the question of why a mode that has largely been theorized through reference to 19th century European drama and 20th century American film should appear in such a recognizable form within the popular literature of Tokugawa Japan, a consideration that itself raises the question of melodrama's relationship to the effects of an experience of rapid modernization.

## The Melodramatic Terrain of Gesaku

First it is important to outline the literary territory within which this mode takes shape, an outline that must touch briefly on both genre and publishing history. The term *gesaku* refers to the body of genres that comprise the world of popular print fiction, primarily centered in the shogunal capital of Edo, from the latter half of the 18th century through the end of the Edo period. These genres, however, cannot easily be discussed as a whole, as they treat a wide array of subject matter through a variety of different modes. The melodramatic mode that I describe here is one that crystallizes in the three specific formats of *kibyōshi*, *gōkan*, and *yomihon* (described in greater detail below) beginning around the year 1790, in the wake of the shogunate's Kansei Reforms of 1787-1793.<sup>195</sup> The reforms were in large part economic, aimed at rehabilitating agriculture in the wake of the recent Tenmei famine (1782-1787), encouraging thrift among domain lords, prohibiting extravagance, and forgiving debt for impoverished retainers of the shogunate. The Reforms also, however, strongly emphasized moral reform. Besides cracking down on unlicensed prostitution and banning unisex bathhouses, the shogunate made a series of interventions into the world of print fiction, imposing a new set of censorship procedures for publishing, and banning a range of immoral or politically sensitive material from publication. To indicate their seriousness about these changes, the authorities made an example of the popular *gesaku* writer Santō Kyōden (1761-1816), sentencing him to 50 days in manacles

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<sup>195</sup> Jonathan Zwicker, in his book *Practices of the Sentimental Imagination* alternatively argues for the operation of a melodramatic mode in the *gesaku* genre known as *ninjōbon* ("books of sentiment"), which he sees as part of a melodramatic continuity extending into the Meiji period. *Ninjōbon* do indeed rely upon an aesthetics of emotional excess, but their overall mode differs significantly from melodrama as I discuss it here; it is perhaps closest to that of the romance. See Zwicker, *Practices of the Sentimental Imagination: Melodrama, the Novel, and the Social Imaginary in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), esp. 71-125.

for having published three works set in the pleasure quarters that were deemed morally offensive; they also slapped a hefty fine on his publisher Tsutaya Jūzaburō (1750-1797).<sup>196</sup>

Kyōden thereafter changed his approach to fiction, producing work that accorded with or even promoted the moral aims of the Reforms, and many other authors followed suit. Vendetta fiction was a safe and appealing endeavor for popular writers because on the surface it depicted a moral act--filially pious revenge--but one that explicitly entailed violence and provided plenty of room for lurid and morally questionable scenes that sold well. The resulting boom in vendetta fiction first appeared in the form of *kibyōshi* (literally “yellow-covers”), short booklets featuring large illustrations with text written into the blank spaces within the image. Initially known for their wit, humor, and sophisticated satire, in the wake of the Reforms *kibyōshi* now began to feature more straightforward narratives of murder and revenge. Vendetta plots, however, required enough room for a clear beginning, middle, and end, and enough plot twists and developments within this frame to keep the story innovative and appealing to readers; beginning around 1803, authors began binding the shorter sheafs of *kibyōshi* into longer volumes, or *gōkan* (“bound books”), producing far lengthier works that were better suited to the many twists and turns of melodramatic revenge fiction. Like *kibyōshi*, *gōkan* combined image and (now much denser) text within a single frame on each page. Right around the same time, *gesaku* authors (particularly Santō Kyōden and Kyokutei Bakin, 1767-1848) began experimenting with longer narrative fiction that privileged text over images. These lengthy, dense works of fiction were known as *yomihon* (“books for reading”), and in their formative early years they, too, were dominated by

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<sup>196</sup> My discussion of Kyōden’s experiences during the Kansei Reforms and their impact on his fiction is indebted to Satō Yukiko’s discussion of these issues in “Edo kōki gesaku no ken’etsu,” in *Ken’etsu, media, bungaku: Edo kara sengo made*, ed. by Suzuki Tomi, Toeda Hirokazu, Hori Hikari, and Munakata Kazushige (Tokyo: Shin’yōsha, 2012), 38-46.

revenge plots. Although length, the importance of illustration, and the specifics of generic form differ to varying degrees among the three forms of *kibyōshi*, *gōkan*, and *yomihon*, the melodramatic mode as I discuss it below is remarkably consistent among all three of them, and authors often wrote in all three forms. All three also exhibit the strong influence of the kabuki theater, from the staging of their illustrations to the structuring of their plots, and it is significant that elements of the melodramatic mode I discuss here were also taking shape at precisely the same time on the stage, where the role of villainy attained a prominence it had not had before and vendetta plays flourished.<sup>197</sup> While I limit my discussion here to print fiction, the melodramatic elements I attend to should be understood as attaining their form in dialogue with the world of the stage. It is also important to note that the elements of melodrama that took shape within the context of the vendetta boom remained a key part of these genres after the rage for vendetta fiction died down in the 1810s. By then *kibyōshi* had itself died out with the advent of the lengthier *gōkan*, but *gōkan* and *yomihon* remained vital forms for decades to come, and they continued to be animated by many of the melodramatic elements I discuss below.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> See James R. Brandon and Samuel L. Leiter, “Introduction,” *Kabuki Plays on Stage: Villainy and Vengeance, 1773-1799* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), esp. 22-25.

<sup>198</sup> Kyokutei Bakin’s monumental *yomihon* *The Eight Dog Chronicle* (*Nansō Satomi Hakkenden*), composed over the course of nearly three decades from 1814-1842, can in fact be considered the most complex and sophisticated embodiment of this mode: a massive drama of virtue in which the primary characters are constructed as the embodied signs of specific moral values (benevolence, filial piety, brotherhood, etc), set into dynamic interaction in ways that render their relationships morally legible. Significantly, it was precisely for these melodramatic elements that *The Eight Dog Chronicle* was critiqued by Tsubouchi Shōyō in his essay *Essence of the Novel* (*Shōsetsu shinzui*, 1885-1886), which aimed to establish a new set of values for the composition of a new, modern fiction.

## Gesaku Melodrama in a Single Image



Figure 1. Broadsheet, ca. 1823. Filial Sons: The Spirit of the East Country.<sup>199</sup>

To begin exploring *gesaku*'s melodramatic mode, let us examine a very basic example: a relatively simple image, an illustration from an early 19th century broadsheet describing a recent vendetta. Such broadsheets (now commonly known as *kawaraban*, more frequently referred to in the Edo period as *yomiuri* after the “reader-sellers” who read the contents aloud as they walked the streets selling them) were cheap, usually illustrated printed items describing recent events of note--love suicides, vendettas, natural disasters, sometimes even the lyrics of popular ditties--often with a much stronger focus on entertainment than on the transmission of factual news. This is not, strictly, a work of popular fiction, but as with many such broadsheets, its aesthetic and

<sup>199</sup> Ono Hideo, *Kawaraban monogatari: Edo jidai masukomi no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yūzankaku shuppan, 1988), 98-99.



narrative dynamic draws heavily upon the world of *gesaku*; it can in many ways be seen as a simple distillation of *gesaku*'s melodramatic mode.

In this broadsheet, a written text accompanies the image, but reading it is not immediately necessary--if we know how to recognize the visual cues, the image and its captions alone already convey a complete narrative. We see two young men clad in white with white headbands, one standing and one crouching, with swords at the ready, before a third glowering swordsman dressed in darker clothes who appears to leap towards them with his sword raised high. Behind him stands a woman, hair flying, jumping forward and brandishing a staff. Large print above these four figures declares: "Filial Sons: The Spirit of the East Country," and small captions next to the two swordsmen in white identify them as "Older brother, age 27" and "Younger brother, age 17." The white clothes and headbands, the mention of filial sons, and the emphasis on their status as brothers tell us that the act of violence represented here is a vendetta.<sup>200</sup> We can infer the beginning of the narrative: at some point the scowling man murdered these young men's father. We know that this was an act of villainy, that the man is a bad man--the menacing look on his face, with its arched, v-shaped eyebrows alone can tell us this--and that he will now meet with righteous justice at the hands of these morally upright brothers, who are prepared to throw away their lives (again, their white clothes show their preparedness to die) on behalf of their father. We know that this is the climax of the narrative, full of dramatic tension, and the arrangement of the four figures presents a moral tableau: we have a sense for the power and danger of the villainous enemy as he looms above the two smaller men and strikes down with his sword, but that only serves to highlight the power of what we know will be the brothers'

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<sup>200</sup> The historical vendetta that served as the inspiration for this particular broadsheet is, incidentally, that of the Asada brothers, whose formal vendetta application document was discussed near the beginning of Chapter One.

eventual, virtuous victory. We know that the brothers will finally gain the upper hand, and that this scene will end with the death of the enemy, even if that death is not represented in the image. We also know that the brothers will go on to flourish in life and be celebrated--much as they are being celebrated, on the streets of Edo, in the broadsheet itself. There is one more element to the moral tableau: we can discern that the staff-brandishing woman is the wife or lover of the enemy, and that she does not hesitate to risk her life to join the fray and protect him in this moment of violence. We know her, as well: she may or may not have known about her lover's past deeds and villainous nature, but it does not matter--she will stick by her man, even at the risk to her own safety, a dramatic and poignant embodiment of the virtue of female fidelity.

In a single image, then, we have a scene that exemplifies and renders highly legible the values of filial piety, brotherhood, and female fidelity, and that suggests the dramatic triumph of virtue over villainy. This image is highly legible because we have met its figures again and again, in one broadsheet or another, in one work of popular vendetta fiction or another, and indeed, we may say that this simple image represents the kernel at the heart of all vendetta fiction of the late Edo period, and exemplifies its ethical-aesthetic mode. There are several key elements we can identify in it that are characteristic of this mode, and which I shall discuss in greater detail below. First, this is a drama of virtue: the filial, white-clad brothers are on the verge of ridding the world of the threatening dark villain. The act of eliminating the man who killed their father affirms their virtuous status, making them recognizable as the "Filial Sons" of the heading, and it also enacts a drama that extends beyond the specifics of their identity, marking a ritual elimination of evil and threat from the world. Second, there is a dynamic of victimization involved in this triumph of virtue: knowing the typical vendetta plot, we can infer that the brothers have suffered

at the hands of their enemy, who took their father from them, and we can also trust that they have endured numerous hardships to seek out and kill their enemy (as the accompanying text, should we glance over it, attests), but the framing of the image itself dramatically stages the threat the virtuous brothers face. The enemy looms above their smaller forms, striking down with his sword as they stand in defensive postures. The brothers, in other words, are underdogs in this image, and we are invited to identify with them emotionally in their threatened status.<sup>201</sup> Finally, separate from this drama of virtue threatened and triumphant, the image makes visible three fundamental moral relationships, each of them deeply rooted in the family: the relationships between father and son, brother and brother, and husband and wife. Recognition of virtue, emotionally charged victimization, and the moral legibility of fundamental psychic family relationships: these are key elements of the mode that dominates *gesaku* vendetta fiction of the turn of the 19th century. I will now discuss each of these three key elements in greater detail, drawing on more complex examples from the world of popular fiction itself to explore how these elements operate and what is at stake in them.

## Dramas of Virtue

*Gesaku* vendetta narratives, and the ethical-aesthetic mode they partake of and help formulate, are narratives of virtue's path towards recognition. They are stories of virtuous characters whose moral status either remains invisible to the world or has in some way been cast into doubt. Many of these narratives begin, for example, with a samurai family of good lineage

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<sup>201</sup> We may recall the longstanding dynamic of vendetta narratives that pits weaker avengers against a more powerful enemy, as discussed in Chapter One. In the historical vendetta upon which this broadsheet is based, the avengers actually surprised the enemy enjoying an evening drink in his own home, and cut him down with hardly a fight. See Hiraide, *Katakiuchi*, [1909] 1990, 196.

and strong ethical values that, owing to the political conflicts of previous generations, has not succeeded in attaining recognition and employment by a lord; the family lives in quiet, moral poverty until the violence of a murder rouses it to vengeful action, leading to eventual recognition by a domain lord and a happy ending in which the family serves the domain and flourishes. Alternatively, the family may be one of good standing that is unfairly maligned. In Santō Kyōden's *gōkan* from 1807 *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama at Futami* (*Osugi Otama futami no adauchi*), for example, a faithful retainer's world is turned upside down when the money he is carrying on behalf of his lord falls into a river and cannot be retrieved, a turn of events that leads to the retainer's suicide and the formal disbanding of his household.<sup>202</sup> Only the vendetta of his filial daughters against the villain who murdered their mother reaffirms the virtuous status of the family and leads to its reconstitution and subsequent flourishing. This narrative arc, of virtue's invisibility and ultimate affirmation, is the fundamental narrative arc of melodrama. As Peter Brooks has written, "melodrama...tends to become the dramaturgy of virtue misprized and eventually recognized. It is about virtue made visible and acknowledged, the drama of a recognition."<sup>203</sup> The act of recognition, moreover, marks a return: it returns the moral family to its proper place, the place it should have been all along, reunited and secure in the employ of a lord on the basis of the virtuous merits it has always possessed; it returns the world to how it "should have been."<sup>204</sup> The desire to reach this point of return drives the narrative

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<sup>202</sup> In Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., *Santō Kyōden zenshū* vol 6. (Tokyo: Perikan sha, 1995), 189-233. See esp. 202-209.

<sup>203</sup> Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 27.

<sup>204</sup> This pattern of the final reinstatement of a nostalgic past is another key element of melodrama as it has been theorized as a mode, and marks a certain conservatism to it, the pleasure of the fulfillment of nostalgia. In Christine Gledhill's words, melodrama is "less about how things ought to be than how they should have been." See Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation," in Gledhill, ed., *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 21.

action of these works. The fact that revenge in the Edo period was understood to be a virtuous act, rooted in filial piety, makes a revenge story easily amenable to a drama of virtue; the implied narrative plot of revenge, moreover, which matches the initial *tick* of injury to the eventual *tock* of vengeful reaction, provides a neat narrative arc whereby virtue, initially victimized, is ultimately shown triumphant and returned to its proper place.<sup>205</sup>

It should be noted that this equation of the vendetta plot with a drama of virtue “misprized and eventually recognized” is not inherent to the vendetta plot itself. In the monumental medieval revenge tale *The Tale of the Soga Brothers* (*Soga monogatari*, ca. mid-14th century), for example, the avenging protagonists are highly sympathetic figures, but they are not constructed as inherently *moral* heroes; indeed, their transformation into angry ghosts after their deaths suggests that their moral status is problematic, that they remain karmically enslaved by their overpowering rancor against their enemy. Indeed, in the moral economy of the *Tale*, every major character seems to harbor a legitimate grievance against every other, rendering clear moral divisions of good and evil or virtue and villainy moot, as discussed in Chapter One.<sup>206</sup> In earlier vendetta literature of the Edo period as well, there is no clear equation between the vendetta plot and a drama of virtue. In the vendetta works of Saikaku, for example, there is no necessary identification of the avenger with the virtuous--indeed, in some of his tales the enemy is the real hero and the avenger is a scoundrel. Nor is there any guarantee that

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<sup>205</sup> The characterization of the relationship between a narrative’s beginning and ending as corresponding to the temporal link between a *tick* and a *tock* comes from Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>206</sup> We may recall Fukuda Akira’s suggestion that the moral universe evoked by the form and language of the earliest version of the *Tale of the Soga Brothers* is the *ashura* realm, the denizens of which are all morally corrupt, condemned to an existence of endless and bloodshed by their inability to rid themselves of rancor and resentment. Fukuda Akira, “Soga monogatari ni okeru ningenzō: Soga kyōdai,” in *Gunkimono to minkan denshō*: 129-141. (Tokyo: Iwasaki bijutsusha, 1972).

virtue (where it does coincide with the avenger) will be recognized and affirmed by the end of the narrative. One of Saikaku's most famous vendetta tales, "An Indiscreet View from the Treetop" (*Mufunbetsu wa mikoshi no kinobori*, from his 1687 collection of vendetta tales *Transmission of the Martial Way*, discussed in the previous chapter), for example, ends with the brutal execution of the avenger, treated as a common murderer because by the end of the tale there is no one left standing who can attest that the killing he commits is the virtuous act of the filial avenger.<sup>207</sup>



Figure 2. Virtue's happy ending, complete with wedding. Santō Kyōden, *Santō kitan tsukue no chiri*, 1805.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>207</sup> Taniwaki Masachika, Fuji Akio, and Inoue Toshiyuki, eds, *Budō denraiki, Saikaku oridome, Yorozu no fumihōgu, Saikaku nagori no tomo*, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai 77 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1989), 117-127.

<sup>208</sup> In Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., *Santō Kyōden zenshū* 5 (Tokyo: Perikan sha, 2009), 368.

*Gesaku* vendetta narratives, however, must end with virtue recognized and rewarded; each concludes with the image of the virtuous avengers arranged (either in text or in image) in a celebratory scene, well-dressed and surrounded by felicitous symbols. This is, however, only the final, concluding image of texts written in this mode; the happy ending is necessarily preceded by much suffering. In Laura Mulvey's words, "the strength of the melodramatic form lies in the amount of dust the story raises along the road, a cloud of over-determined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled in the last five minutes."<sup>209</sup> Indeed, even those final, felicitous images do not mark a genuine, unproblematic return to how things "should have been": the celebrated family is always missing the member or members whose deaths precipitated the vendetta, and by the time the felicitous conclusion arrives, the surviving members have been made to suffer dearly.

### **Victimization**

The victimization of the virtuous protagonists is a fundamental element of *gesaku*'s melodramatic vendetta narratives. In the broadsheet discussed above, we saw the dynamic of victimization hinted at in the defensive postures of the avengers against their larger, looming enemy. In full vendetta narratives, however, the victimization tends to be far more extreme and graphic, and it serves two purposes. It is through the act of suffering that the moral status of the protagonists is proven; and the heartrending construction of these acts of suffering encourage the audience to identify with the victims, and to partake of the experience of victimization.

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<sup>209</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," in Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 76.

That suffering is crucial to the establishment of moral status in this mode is playfully articulated by Santō Kyōden in his brilliant parody of *gesaku* vendetta narratives, *The After-the-Fact Vendetta* (*Katakiuchi ato no matsuri*, 1788), discussed at the opening of Chapter One. We may recall the protagonist Yōtarō's summary of a proper vendetta:

Since olden times, in books about vendetta, in order to avenge the death of his lord or parent, [an avenger] must sleep among fields and mountains, wreck his body, sell his daughter or wife into prostitution, endure his regrets, disguise himself, give no thought to poverty, encounter hardships and sadness, and finally kill his enemy--that is what makes it a loyal or filial act.<sup>210</sup>

That an avenger must undergo all manner of hardships in his quest for vengeance was established as a convention of vendetta fiction beginning with the medieval *Tale of the Soga Brothers*, but in *gesaku* it becomes established as a sign of virtue, the proof of a character's filial status.

The nature of the suffering also becomes more extreme, its construction calibrated to evoke a strong emotional response. Kyōden's parodic avenger Yōtarō must pay a man to give him a roadside beating, but the treatment of the avenging sisters in Kyōden's *gōkan* *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama at Futami*, introduced above, is far more graphic. One of the low points of this narrative occurs when the sisters, who had sold themselves into prostitution in order to repay to the lord the money their father had lost, only to have that money stolen by a villain who also murders their mother, are visited by their destitute grandmother, now the only other surviving member of the family. The grandmother has been reduced to beggary, and has barely survived her journey to the brothel where the sisters work. They hide her in a small shrine in the brothel's garden and take turns feeding her, but they are soon discovered by their villainous madam, who brutally punishes the grandmother, beating her over and over again with

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<sup>210</sup> Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., Santō Kyōden zenshū vol 1 (Tokyo: Perikan sha, 1992), 369-370.



a stick and finally kicking her out to the street. She then strips the sisters to their undergarments, ties them up so that they dangle from the eaves of a small shed, and sadistically stabs them repeatedly in the thighs with a dagger until the “flow of blood ran like a spring.”



Figure 3. The victimization of virtue. Santō Kyōden, *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama at Futami*.

The depiction of this torture scene becomes highly auditory, with the grandmother listening helplessly to the cries of her granddaughters from beyond the gate, as music drifting down from the brothel provides a pitiful soundtrack:

声を立てなば、なほ責められんと、忍泣きする心のうち、何に譬へん方もなし。  
折しも二階に客をもてなす三味線の音色も唄も細々と、いとど哀れを添へにけり。  
遣手は、なをも責め足らず、又も小刀針を立てければ、姉妹は声も嘎れ、唯ひい／＼と泣きけるにぞ、老母は外にてこれを聞く度に、我が身を斬らるゝ思ひにて、血の涙をぞ流しける。

If they raised their voices she only tortured them more, and so they stifled their sobs. There is nothing that can compare with the feeling in their hearts. It so happened that just then a guest was being entertained on the second floor to the sounds of the *shamisen* and singing, which faintly [reached the garden], adding its pathos [to the scene]. The madam did not tire of her torture and kept stabbing at them with her dagger, until the sisters' voices went dry and they could only let out gasping sobs. Each time their grandmother heard them from outside, she felt as if her own body were being cut, and she shed tears of blood.<sup>211</sup>

We are invited to feel pity at the plight of the two innocent sisters, who have sacrificed everything for their family only to meet with brutal torture, and the scene is constructed such that we listen to their stifled cries together with their grandmother, helplessly, from beyond the fence (the point of view from which the illustration is also framed), hearing in our reading minds the plaintive notes of the *shamisen*. Linda Williams, drawing on the work of Franco Moretti, links the pathos of melodrama, and its arousal of emotion in the viewer or reader, to the passage of narrative time; tears come at the moment when it appears that it may already be *too late*; they are a “product of powerlessness.”<sup>212</sup> They mark the point where the narrative's eventual arrival at its destined and desired point of conclusion, the return to the way things “should have been,” is most direly threatened. Drawing a comparison with Romantic music's structure of departure from and return to the tonic, Williams writes, “Primed by the beginning tonic of the original theme--the register of the original space of innocence--the narrative wants to return to this point of origin and teases us throughout all subsequent development with the haunting threat of its loss.”<sup>213</sup> Indeed, the scene of the sisters' torture exudes helplessness--they with their arms bound,

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<sup>211</sup> *Santō Kyōden zenshū* vol. 6, 219.

<sup>212</sup> Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” in Nick Browne, ed., *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 71.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

dangled above the ground, unable even to cry out in pain, their grandmother trapped on the other side of the fence. We see such scenes again and again in late *gesaku* vendetta fiction: the moment when the innocent protagonists come to the brink of horrific destruction, threatening the narrative arc that should conclude in virtue's affirmation. Two avenging lovers, mistakenly believing they have committed incest, prepare to end their lives by throwing themselves into a raging torrent in Kyokutei Bakin's *yomihon* of 1805 *The Miraculous Destiny of Moon and Ice* (*Geppyō kien*); in Kyōden's *gōkan* *The Women of Okazaki: A Vendetta* (*Katakiuchi Okazaki joroshu*, 1807) an avenging father, his family on the verge of starvation, prepares to stab his own child in order to preserve enough food to care for his ailing mother, who is simultaneously preparing to stab herself in another room in order to save her son and grandson.<sup>214</sup> Yet as Williams adds, pathos is not only about helplessness: "because tears are an acknowledgment of hope that desire will be fulfilled, they are also a source of future power; indeed they are almost an investment in that power. Mute pathos entitles action."<sup>215</sup>

Indeed, it is rarely "too late." These narratives may dwell on the suffering of their innocent protagonists, and they may thereby enlist our sympathy and attest to the characters' virtue, but they do not remain in that place forever. There is a power in victimization, precisely because we long to see the victim released from his or her state of suffering and returned to a position of safety--and that release inevitably comes through last-minute action. In Bakin's *yomihon*, the mistaken lovers are called back *just before* throwing themselves into the river, by desperate, shouting voices that correct their dreadful misunderstanding; in Kyōden's scene of

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<sup>214</sup> For *Katakiuchi Okazaki joroshu*, see Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., Santō Kyōden zenshū vol. 6 (Tokyo: Perikan sha, 1995), 145-187. For *Geppyō kien*, see *Kindai Nihon bungaku taikēi*, vol. 15 (Tokyo: Kokumin tosho kabushiki gaisha, 1927), 3-107.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 71.

near infanticide, the family's long-lost mother appears at the front gate just in time to stop the family members from killing each other. In the scene of Otama and Osugi's torture at the hands of the brothel's madam, the tale's other heroine, a woman of prodigious strength named Okane, suddenly bursts onto the scene and beats the madam repeatedly with a *shakuhachi* flute until she flees, then dresses the suffering sisters and treats their wounds. The punishment of the madam and the restoration of the sisters to health and safety are represented in a illustration that dramatically represents this complete reversal of fortune as a single tableau.



Figure 4. The reversal of virtue's fortunes. *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama at Futami.*

This scene of “in the nick of time” rescue that saves the virtuous protagonists just before it truly is “too late,” moreover, nearly always marks a fundamental turning point in the narrative, the

spot at which the victimized heroes, having proven their virtue to the reader through their suffering, begin to acquire the power that will enable them to fulfill the vendetta and achieve public recognition of their virtue within the text.<sup>216</sup> In the case of the tortured sisters, for example, their stoic suffering on behalf of their family so impresses the physically powerful Okane that she joins forces with them, and they soon discover that Okane is undertaking a vendetta of her own against the same man who murdered their mother. Once they begin working together, the three women meet with better and better fortune, until they succeed at last in killing their enemy.

### **Legible Moral Relationships**

The figure of the enemy is, of course, the original agent of victimization and the ultimate object of action. It is he who inflicts the initial wound upon the family by murdering one or more of its members, and it is he whose death at the hands of the avenging family members secures the virtuous family's recognition by an authority figure, and its subsequent flourishing. The enemy, dastardly though he may be, is thus a necessary element of the narrative arc of works in this mode; without his violence, the virtuous family might languor in moral obscurity forever. Given his role in this drama of virtue as virtue's antithesis, it is perhaps not surprising that the enemy embodies villainy, both in his behavior and his appearance as depicted in text and image. Villains in these texts are villains through and through. They are menacing and powerful, but beyond that they also defy the laws of the community, threaten or disregard its hierarchical order, and transgress its fundamental moral norms. They practice theft and banditry; they murder their own

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<sup>216</sup> For a complex discussion of the relationship between "in the nick of time" and "too late," particularly in terms of film melodrama's relationship to time, see Williams, "Melodrama Revised," 69-77.

lords in fits of pique; they kidnap and torture women. They are vengeful not on behalf of others, but in reaction to slights, insults, and injuries to themselves. Their appearance is often derived from the villains of the kabuki stage, and they appear, much like the enemy in the broadsheet above, large and menacing.



Figure 5. Villainy embodied. Santō Kyōden, *The Women of Okazaki: A Vendetta*.



Figure 6. The villain as literal backstabber. Santō Kyōden, *The Origins of Steeped Tea: A Vendetta*, 1805.<sup>217</sup>

Yet the villain is not the only figure in these texts who wholeheartedly embodies and performs his moral character. The Manichean division between good and evil that underlies these texts, and the trajectory of their recognition of virtue is one key register of melodrama; another is, in Peter Brooks' words, "that of basic psychic modes and relations," which tend to play out within the family itself.<sup>218</sup> We may remember that the broadsheet discussed above vividly represented not only the conflict between threatening evil and ultimately triumphant virtue, but also the three key moral family relationships between father and son (filial piety), brother and brother (brotherhood), and husband and wife (female fidelity). I have thus far discussed the family as a unit that together comprises the protagonist of these texts; it is the family's trajectory to recognized virtue that they trace. This family is, however, comprised of multiple members, and the relationships among them are represented in these texts in terms nearly as starkly legible as those in the initial broadsheet illustration. Families in late *gesaku* vendetta narratives nearly always consist of a handful of basic familial positions that stand in dynamic moral relation to one another. This protagonist-family usually involves (at most) three generations, comprised of basic positions such as husband, wife, son, daughter, grandmother, grandfather, the characterization of each remarkably consistent across text after text. As the family undergoes its ordeal, we watch as these fundamental moral relationships interact under increasingly dire conditions. As in Kyōden's *The Women of Okazaki*, introduced above, the father figure may be forced to choose between the life of his son and the life of his mother. In *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama*, their father must acquiesce, against his wishes, to his daughters' plan to sell themselves

<sup>217</sup> *Katakiuchi sencha no hajimari*, in Santō Kyōden zenshū henshū iinkai, ed., Santō Kyōden zenshū vol. 5 (Tokyo: Perikan sha, 2009), 292.

<sup>218</sup> Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 54.

into prostitution so that he can repay the money he has lost to his lord. In the text that accompanies the broadsheet from 1823, we learn that the avenging brothers initially face a conflict between loyalty to lord and filial obligation to father. Peter Brooks has referred to melodrama as a “drama of pure psychic signs--called Father, Daughter, Protector, Persecutor, Judge, Duty, Obedience, Justice--that interest us through their clash, by the dramatic space created through their interplay, providing the means for their resolution.”<sup>219</sup> This clash of signs is a key part of the drama of *gesaku* vendetta fiction, and its familial positions are those implicated in fundamental Confucian moral values: filial piety, brotherhood, female fidelity.

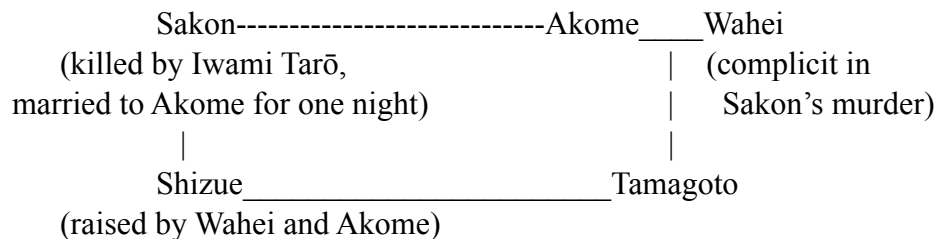
In lengthy, convoluted works, particularly *yomihon*, which is primarily text-based and therefore not limited by the need to fit its text into a visual frame shared with illustration, the drama of clashing signs can become extraordinarily complex. In Kyokutei Bakin’s first *yomihon*, the vendetta narrative *The Miraculous Destiny of Moon and Ice* (*Geppyō kien*, alluded to briefly above), one of the most dramatic turning points in the entire narrative is a scene of remarkable family revelations in which one set of fundamental family relations is revealed to have been false, and is replaced with another, altering the relation of each family member to every other one. The setting, appropriately, is the edge of a ravine above the torrent of the Imose River, the name of which can mean either “Wife-Husband” or “Sister-Brother.” The crisis begins when the young, virtuous protagonist Kumagai Shizue is informed that his fiancée Tamagoto--with whom he has already consummated his relationship--is actually his sister. The two are mortified, and they immediately resolve to drown themselves in the Imose River. Before they can do so, however, they are stopped by Shizue’s parents, who reveal that Shizue and Tamagoto are not

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 35-36.



siblings--because Shizue's parents are not his real parents, but foster parents who have raised him in the wake of his father's murder by the evil Iwami Tarō. Shizue, shocked at this news, and concerned that he has proven unfilial by not pursuing revenge earlier on behalf of the father he never knew he had, immediately resolves to embark upon a vendetta against Iwami. Before he can do so, his foster father Wahei makes yet another revelation--he, Wahei, was complicit in the murder of Shizue's real father, and therefore Shizue should first kill *him*, the man he grew up thinking was his father. This also means that Shizue's lover Tamagoto, the real daughter of Wahei, is the daughter of his enemy. At this point Shizue hardly knows what to do.



The backstory to this series of revelations is explicated over many pages, and is so convoluted as to be mind-boggling--or in other words, seemingly morally illegible. The drama of the scene emerges from the participants' attempts to untangle it, render it legible, and resolve it. What is a son's duty to the foster father who raised him but is revealed to have helped murder the biological father he never knew? What is a man's proper relationship to the fiancée who is revealed to be the daughter of that murderer? Perhaps most convoluted and dramatic is the relationship between Shizue's foster parents, Wahei and Akome. Years ago Akome had been married to Shizue's father Sakon as his second wife, but he was murdered on their wedding night; she later married Wahei. She now learns that Wahei, to whom she has been married for many years, was complicit in the death of her one-night husband. What is she to do?

相女猛然と立ち上り、倭文が腰刀を拿りて引き抜き、「亡夫の仇當知よ」といひつ、和平が肩尖二寸計り傷つけ、その刀を以て自己が肚につきたつれば、衆皆、「こはいかに」と驚きて之を勸る。相女息を吻と吐きて道へらく、「前夫とは一旬の親しみあり、後夫とは二十年の恩あり。恩愛をもていはば何れか重しとせん。然れども公道をもて論ずれば、後夫は前夫の仇人なり、いかで一刀怨みざらん。既にその姦計に陥りしを知らず、讎を復はんとして却りて仇家の婦となれば、死しては前夫に罪を賠償難く、生きてはわが児に教ふるに言なし。こゝをもて後夫に傷けて前夫に謝し、更に自刃して後夫に十年の恩に換ふ。やよ倭文速かに石見とやらんを討つて孝道を全くせよ...」といふ聲も細りつゝ、鮮血滾々と瀆り、白雪却りて紅に變ず。... 和平この光景を見て云く、「相女しばらく俟て、吾今下土の郷導すべし。... 因果亦復斯くのごとし、今や倭文が腰刀に貫かれ、聊か孝道を完からしめん」と相女が持ちたる刃を抜きとり、みづから肚をかき破り、相女を抱きて水中に飛び入りたり。

Akome suddenly leapt up ferociously and drew the sword hanging at Shizue's side. 'Enemy of my dead husband, remember this!' she shouted, and she gave Wahei a two inch cut on his shoulder. She then plunged the sword into her own belly. 'What is this?' everyone cried out in surprise, and they attempted to staunch Akome's wound. Akome, gasping, said, 'I shared only a moment of closeness (*shitashimi*) with my first husband, but twenty years of affection (*on*) with my second husband. In terms of love (*on'ai*), who should be more precious to me? Yet in terms of the proper ways of the world (*kōdō*), my second husband is the enemy of my first. How could I not express my resentment with at least one cut? I did not realize that I had already fallen into an evil design, and when I should have been seeking revenge, I had made myself the wife of my husband's killer! Even if I die, it will not absolve me of my sin towards my first husband, and if I live, I will be a terrible example for my child. By inflicting a wound upon my second husband, I have expressed my apology to my first husband, and by killing myself, I will repay my second husband for his twenty years of kindness. Shizue! Quickly track down Iwami and fulfill your duties as a filial son.' ...Her voice was growing weaker and weaker, and fresh blood gushed out, dyeing the white snow crimson... Observing this scene, Wahei said, 'Wait, Akome, I should be your guide to the underworld!... This is the way of karma. I will pierce my own breast with Shizue's sword, and in that way cause him to fulfill at least part of his duty to the Way of Filial Piety (*kōdō*).' He pulled the sword from Akome, sliced open his own belly, grasped Akome, and plunged together with her into the water.<sup>220</sup>

<sup>220</sup> Bakin, *Geppyō kien*, 67-68.

Akome's act of vengeance against Wahei--raising a sword against the man she considers her husband, but only giving him a two inch wound--is remarkably precise. It honors her obligation to take some kind of revenge for his involvement in the murder of her first husband, but it also acknowledges her depth of feeling for the man with whom she has shared her life for twenty years, as opposed to the husband to whom she was married for only one night. She views Wahei simultaneously as enemy and as life partner, and must find a way to act accordingly to both. Her act of fatal violence against herself is, on the one hand, an act of atonement for the injury she has done him as her husband, but it also serves as the guarantee that this deed was not a mere cover by which to evade more dire consequences. Wahei's final act is a similarly precise resolution of conflicting moral demands: it resolves a dilemma for Shizue, who must take vengeance against him for his involvement in the death of the birth father he never knew, but who cannot fathom striking down the man who raised him as his own son. By stabbing himself with Shizue's sword, Wahei allows Shizue symbolically to take revenge without committing the act himself, and by dying together with Akome he shows both his affection and his atonement to her for the life of moral violation he forced her, unwittingly, to lead.

### **The Landscape of Tokugawa Moral Ideology**

To understand what is at stake in the dramatic clash of familial signs and relations that is so fundamental to this narrative mode, it is important to understand that this play of basic family positions is not limited to *gesaku* alone, but is also implicit in the moral ideology actively promoted by the Tokugawa shogunate and circulated in popular moral discourse. The fundamental moral relationships mentioned several times above are among those included in the

Confucian “five relations”: lord-subject, parent-child, husband-wife, brother-brother, and friend-friend. The values these relations represent--loyalty, filial piety, fidelity, brotherhood, and friendly affection--are those presented as underlying an ideal human community in Tokugawa social ideology. Depictions of these ideal human relationships circulated in many forms, both popular and official, including educational tracts, narratives of filial exemplars, Chinese Confucian classics such as the *Classic of Filial Piety*, “Biographies of Filial Subjects” (*kōshiden*) published by individual domains, and texts disseminated by the shogunate itself. The most monumental of this last category was the massive *Official Records of Filial Piety and Righteousness* (*Kankoku kōgiroku*), compiled over the course of twelve years as part of the Kansei Reforms. This work was published by the shogunate itself in 1801, and was intended for sale on the popular print market. The shogunate began by soliciting accounts of exemplars of virtue from throughout the land, primarily seeking accounts of virtuous commoners. The editors then organized the entries they received from local officials and provincial administrations by province, listing the names of people involved in 8,563 instances of virtuous behavior in total. Of these cases, 787 feature not just names but full accounts of the instances of virtuous conduct. As the title of the work suggests, the overwhelming emphasis is on the virtue of filial piety (*kōkō*), but the among other virtues emphasized are a number that are equally familiar from the material we have examined thus far: loyalty (*chūgi*), female fidelity or chastity (*teisetsu*), brotherhood (*kyōdai mutsumaji*), and harmony in household (*kanai mutsumaji*).

The shogunate’s purpose in compiling and publishing this massive work appears to have been twofold. On the one hand, it is a work of moral education and indoctrination intended to bring the moral behavior of the populace in line with official social ideology in a manner

consistent with the moralizing aims of the Kansei Reforms. On the other hand the work attests to the benevolent governance of the shogunate itself: only in a land properly and justly ruled could virtue flourish and be recognized. The publication of the *Official Records* is the act of *recognition*, on the part of the shogunate, of the virtue in the land that its own virtuous rule has made possible.<sup>221</sup> In Sugano Noriko's words, the "uniform format of the *Official Records* creates an impression of a unified political and moral realm."<sup>222</sup> Let us briefly examine how this uniform format operates.

Each entry in the *Official Records* begins with a heading that lists a virtuous quality followed by a person's name: "Faithful Wife: Hatsu." "Filial Exemplar: Daikichi." "Exemplar of Loyalty: Shinroku." The accounts that follow then tell the story of each of these figures' virtuous deeds in simple language. The drama of these accounts nearly always takes place within the space of the immediate family, and often the characters involved are referred to not by name, but simply in terms of family position: Father, Mother-in-Law, Husband, Daughter. The "Filial Exemplar" Kihei of Hitachi Province, for example, has a mother whose illness has made her paralyzed from the waist down for many years. Kihei helps her use the toilet, warms her legs in winter and cools her in summer, ardently tills the fields but also does a woman's work in the house. He has married on several occasions but has sent each wife away when she met with his mother's disfavor. Whenever he has to leave his mother's side, he hurries back as quickly as he

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<sup>221</sup> For two comprehensive discussions of the *Official Records*, see Sugano Noriko, "State Indoctrination of Filial Piety in Tokugawa Japan: Sons and Daughters in the *Official Records of Filial Piety*," in Dorothy Ko, JaHyun Haboush, and Joan R. Piggott, eds., *Women and Confucian Cultures in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 170-189, and Niels Van Steenpaal, "Kinsei chūki ni okeru 'kōshi kenshō' no kenkyū: 'dōtoku bunka' shi no kōsō." PhD diss. Kyōto University, 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Sugano, "State Indoctrination," 173.

can.<sup>223</sup> The “Faithful Wife” Ritsu, also of Hitachi, marries a farmer named Takichi, who soon falls ill. Ritsu’s parents-in-law are both over seventy years old and cannot tend the fields. Ritsu faithfully tends to them and takes care of her ailing husband. Her natal family, learning of her predicament, urges her to leave and return home, but she knows that no one else will take care of the family she has married into, and so she does not leave. “Even when her own parents cruelly cut off communication, she harbored no resentment, but continued attentively caring [for her husband and his parents] without neglect.”<sup>224</sup> The “Exemplar of Brotherhood” Yohachirō of Michinoku seeks out his long lost older brother after the death of his parents, and finally finds him, blind and living in illness and poverty. Yohachirō brings him home and earnestly tends to his every need night and day. They are very poor, but both like drinking; when there is not enough alcohol for both of them, Yohachirō merely pretends to drink and serves all the alcohol to his brother. He once took a wife, but fearing a third mouth would prevent him from adequately feeding and clothing his brother, he sent her away.<sup>225</sup> Each of these narratives ends in an identical manner: the virtuous protagonists are brought to the attention of the local lord, who praises them and rewards them for their virtue, usually with money or rice, and sometimes a reduction in taxes.

The narrative mode of this work shares some basic elements with the *gesaku* works we have examined. They are stories of the recognition of virtue. The characters involved are reduced to the status of signs within a family system--father, mother, son, sister, daughter-in-law. Their interaction constitutes a series of highly legible--indeed, explicitly labeled--moral relationships.

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<sup>223</sup> Sugano Noriko, ed., *Kankoku kōgiroku*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1999), 221.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 126-127.

What is significantly different in the narrative economy of the *Official Records* is the *absence* of villainy and of dramatic moral contradiction. The work creates a moral landscape in which villainy is not necessary in order for virtue to make itself apparent and receive recognition. Hardship may help to render the workings of virtue visible, but all that is ultimately necessary is the presence of a benevolent administration that can foster virtue throughout the land and recognize and reward it when it appears. The acknowledgement of instances of evil--even in a dynamic that ultimately makes virtue recognizable--would, indeed, work against the ideological intent of the compendium, as it would suggest a moral flaw in the government that had allowed evil to come into being in the realm. It is perhaps for this reason that filial vendettas, which necessarily involve an initial act of murder, are extremely limited in the *Official Records*, restricted to ten entries explicitly banished to an Appendix, where they are listed as examples of “extraordinary deeds” (*kitoku*); of these ten entries, only one includes a narrative account. Nor do we discover in these stories a drama of contradictory moral choice; the exemplars of this work are never pushed into dire situations where a moral act may indeed appear immoral, such as murdering one’s own child in order to exhibit filial piety to one’s parent. Even when they do face dilemmas of choice, such as Ritsu, who must decide whether to stay with her marriage family or return to her birth home, the correct moral solution (in this case to remain faithful to her husband) is always clear, and the text emphasizes that the moral exemplar “felt no resentment” over the consequences of making this choice. We will certainly find no faithful wife here forced into a dramatic and nearly impossible dilemma like that of Akome in Bakin’s text above, struggling to find a way to demonstrate her faithfulness to two husbands, one of whom participated in the murder of the other.

I do not mean to suggest that the melodramatic mode of *gesaku* emerges in specific response to *The Official Records of Filial Piety and Righteousness* itself, but it partakes of a shared world of moral ideology that pervaded the society of the late Edo period--a moral ideology that was, moreover, actively propagated by the authorities during the Kansei Reforms (including through interventions into the world of publishing such as the publication of the *Official Records* and the punishment of Santō Kyōden and his publisher, mentioned above). *Gesaku* meets this moral ideology at its points of contradiction, and renders visible its darker implications. Its narrative and aesthetic mode, which aims at moral legibility, extends this legibility into virtue's violent corners, throwing moral relationships into seemingly irresolvable conflict and dreaming up convoluted clashes of familial signs (as in the dramatic night of revelations above the Imose River) in ways that challenge the possibility of rendering them legible at all.

The melodramatic mode has been theorized by multiple scholars in terms of repression. Its excesses of style and emotion have been linked by Geoffrey Newell-Smith to the repressions involved in its social and psychic contradictions and ideological constraints.<sup>226</sup> Laura Mulvey has articulated a similar point: "Ideological contradiction is the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden, conscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes. No ideology can pretend to totality: it must provide an outlet for its inconsistencies."<sup>227</sup> Peter Brooks argues that "melodramatic rhetoric, and the whole expressive enterprise of the genre, represents a victory over repression. We could conceive of this repression as simultaneously

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<sup>226</sup> Geoffrey Newell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, Vol. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 193-194.

<sup>227</sup> Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," 75.



social, psychological, historical, and conventional: what could not be said...within the codes of society.”<sup>228</sup> *Gesaku* melodrama gives dramatic form to the repressed implications of Tokugawa moral ideology, reveling in its contradictions and conjuring up dire moral dilemmas into which it can, *in extremis*, force the virtuous. Yet *gesaku* melodrama also retains its trajectory towards the “happy ending,” the moment when virtue will be recognized and subsequently flourish. How does it resolve this internal contradiction, between virtue challenged by its own inconsistencies and virtue finally triumphant?

It does so in two ways. One is to sacrifice along the way characters like Akome, who--by plunging a sword into her belly and falling into the raging current of the river--vividly renders contradictions inherent in certain moral values visible, while leaving alive main heroes like the lovers Shizue and Tamagoto, who survive to complete the vendetta and fulfill virtue’s ultimate destiny. The other way is to force a miraculous, *deus ex machina* intervention just at the moment when things seem already “too late”--the moment when the virtuous father is about to stab his own infant or when the filial daughters are on the verge of being tortured to death for tending to their ailing grandmother. Significantly, these “just in time” interventions are usually staged by uncanny figures who both are and are not of the established moral order. In *The Women of Okazaki*, a magical bird takes the form of the hero’s dead wife in order to stop him from stabbing his own son: the bird fills the role of Wife and Mother in the family long enough to bring the family back from the brink of starvation and eliminate the moral dilemma faced by the father. Yet even as the bird fills this moral position in the family, it remains simultaneously not-quite-human. In a later scene of Bakin’s *The Miraculous Destiny of Moon and Ice*, the hero’s loyal

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<sup>228</sup> Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 41.

lover Tamagoto is forced to marry another man, thereby violating the virtue of female fidelity, in order to earn enough money to purchase the medicine that will save her ailing fiancé's life--an act, paradoxically, of profound female fidelity. In a scene of horrendous violence, this new husband tortures and kills her when she refuses to sleep with him in order to remain faithful to Shizue. Only later do we learn that the real Tamagoto is still alive and well, and that a shape-shifting fox had temporarily taken her form in order to spare her the brutal consequences of her moral dilemma.<sup>229</sup> In the scene examined earlier, in which the sisters Osugi and Otama are tortured by the madam of the brothel they have been sold to for attempting to care for their grandmother, they are saved by the powerful Okane. Okane in every way resembles a virtuous, filial daughter and loyal sister, and she fills those roles to typical perfection within her family--but she also happens to possess unworldly, superhuman strength.

Birds, foxes, superhuman women--these are not the figures that populate the moral landscape of shogunal moral ideology or the educational tracts through which moral discourse circulated. They are virtuous but simultaneously impossible figures, beings that fit, at least for a moment, into the moral roles and relations of the idealized human society of moral ideology, but in the process stretch the bounds and possibilities of those roles by possessing an excess that exceeds the limits of accepted moral categories, meaning that they simultaneously do not fit. There is a remarkable scene in *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama* in which a monstrous sea creature, in the dead of night, leaps onto the deck of the ship that is carrying the avenging sisters and their companion Okane in pursuit of their enemy. The prodigiously strong Okane

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<sup>229</sup> We may recall that a similar dilemma--of being faithful by being unfaithful--is faced by Saikaku's nameless working woman, as discussed in the previous chapter. The difference between the mode at work in Saikaku's fiction and that operative in these *gesaku* works is clear: Saikaku never allows his characters an easy, much less a magical, way out. They must always live out the consequences of their actions.

wrestles the beast to the deck and calls for light. By the light of a torch they see a fantastic creature:

大きさは小牛の如く、頭に鳶色の毛を生じて腰まで垂れ、顔は猫に類し、両眼の光稲妻の如くにてきつく剣の如く、両の手に水掻ありて爪は刀の如く、両足は魚の如くにて歩む事ならず。背中に五色の鱗あり、腰の回りに色々の貝・海草など付きて岩の如く、腹は黄色にて蟾の腹の如し。

It was as large as a small cow, with auburn hair that hung to its waist. Its face resembled a cat's, and the light of its eyes resembled lightning or swords. Its hands were webbed, its nails like blades, and its two feet resembled fish--it could not walk. Its back was covered in scales of five colors, and around its waist were all kinds of shellfish and seaweed, stuck to it as to a stone. Its belly was yellow like the belly of a toad.<sup>230</sup>

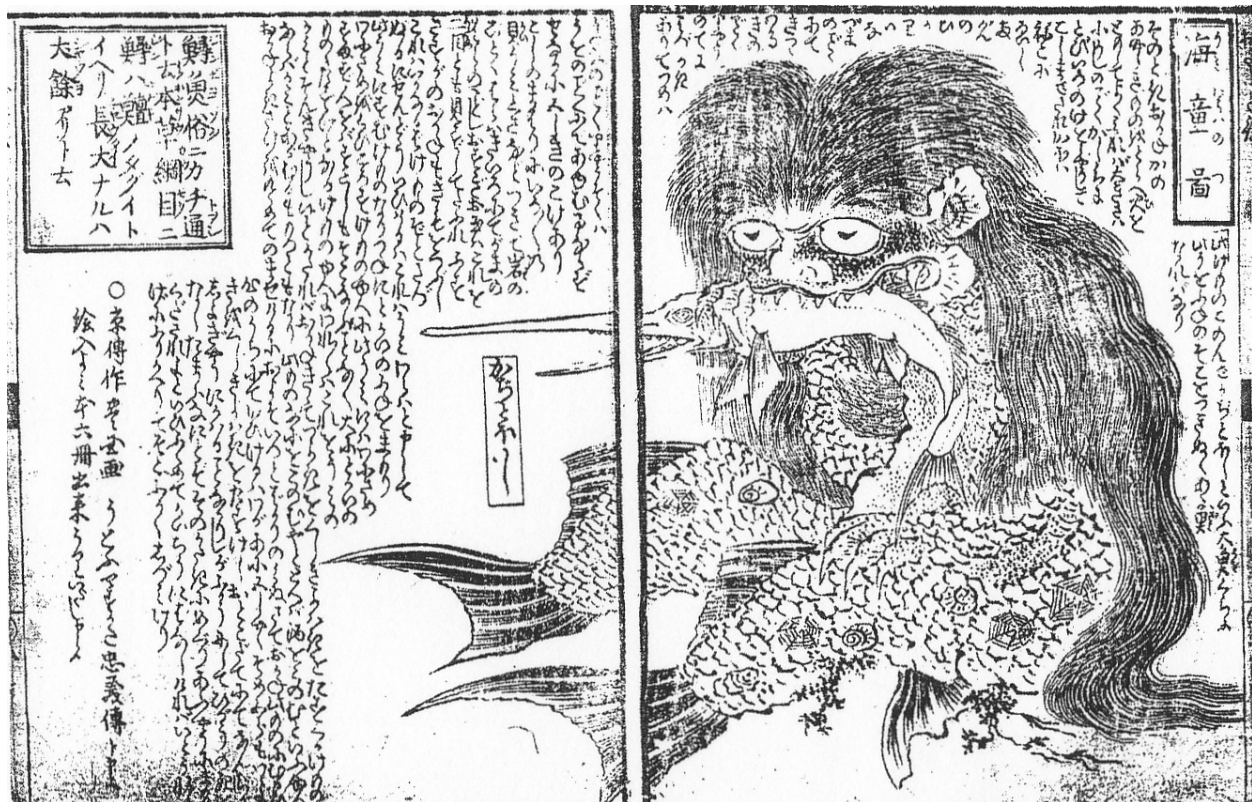


Figure 7. The composite monster “Sea-Child.” *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama at Futami*.

Osugi and Otama immediately faint upon seeing the monstrous creature, and even the courageous Okane is petrified. She asks the boat captain what creature this is, and he explains

<sup>230</sup> Osugi Otama futami no adauchi, 222.

that it is known as the *umiwarawa*, the “Sea-Child,” an auspicious creature revered as a god by the local sea folk. It feasts on sharks and other dangerous sea creatures, but it protects ships as they cross the waters and has never been known to harm a human being. Okane, impressed, praises the creature for its willingness to “crush the strong and protect the weak.” She sees in it the reflection of her dead brother, a gallant (*otokodate*) likewise known for his virtuous protection of those who cannot protect themselves: “He was exactly like you,” she says quietly to the creature. Okane is, herself, consciously styled as a female version (*onnadate*) of this brother, whom she seeks to avenge; like him, she uses her superhuman strength to right wrongs and protect the helpless. In the “Sea-Child,” she is presented with an uncanny reflection of herself, a being that does not quite fit any category, but that is nonetheless a virtuous force for good.

These uncanny, liminal beings--whether sea creature, magical fox, or superhuman woman--are forms of the excess that *gesaku* melodrama gives expression to in its confrontation with the contradictions and repressions of moral ideology. Empowered but also impossible, they step in from the margins of humanity to rescue humanity from its own moral dilemmas; but they inevitably leave the fact of those dilemmas intact. Virtue is preserved, but it is preserved by a force that is not accounted for in the accepted moral order. As Brooks argues, “melodrama partakes of the dream world...and this is in no wise more true than in saying what is in ‘real life’ unsayable.”<sup>231</sup> In this case, the melodrama of *gesaku* gives voice to the repressed unsayable of official social ideology: that virtue possesses its own dangers and contradictions, and that other visions of virtue may be imaginable.

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<sup>231</sup> Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 41.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, the melodramatic mode of *gesaku* vendetta fiction partakes of the moral discourse and ideology of its moment, playing with the same values and drawing upon the same idealized and typological figures of the moral family as those found in shogunal texts promoting an official ideology of family-based social harmony. This melodramatic mode keeps virtue triumphant, it rescues moral contradictions at their moments of greatest danger, and it ultimately remains within the limitations of the “ideologically permissible.”<sup>232</sup> Yet in its willingness to put those family positions and moral relationships under pressure through the intercession of villainy, which is also necessary to bring about the ultimate recognition and triumph of virtue, it simultaneously makes space for the expression of moral ideology’s hidden contradictions and repressed violence. Virtuous characters find themselves again and again placed in dire situations from which virtue alone cannot save them; only the intercession of uncanny, fantastic beings who simultaneously embody human virtue and test the bounds of the human moral order, can offer rescue. *Gesaku* melodrama thus performs a double gesture, rendering visible a potentially critical vision of the family-based moral ideology of the time, and simultaneously obscuring it through the actions of figures from beyond the ordinary human order, who themselves hint at other possibilities for what virtue may be.

Melodrama, Peter Brooks argues, “starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary glue. It plays out the force of that anxiety with the apparent triumph of villainy, and it dissipates it with the eventual victory of virtue.”<sup>233</sup> In Brooks’ theory, which is based upon an

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<sup>232</sup> Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Investigation,” 38.

<sup>233</sup> Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 20.

examination of 19th century European theatrical melodrama, the traditional patterns no longer provide the glue because the Enlightenment and the French Revolution have brought about the end of a cohesive social order that had recourse to the Sacred for moral meaning. Melodrama is a search for a “moral occult” operative within the realities of a “post-sacred era.”<sup>234</sup> It is for these reasons that Brooks identifies melodrama as a “peculiarly modern form,” and indeed the idea of a link between melodrama and modernity is a key element in much of the theoretical writing on melodrama of the past few decades.<sup>235</sup> What, then, are we to make of the fact that a highly similar mode is recognizably at work in the popular literature of Edo Japan, a society clearly not directly impacted by the French Revolution’s “post-sacred” world, and one that has also been characterized by the amorphous term “early modern”? If melodrama is indeed linked to “modernity,” what clues can it give about the question of modernity as it relates to Edo Japan?<sup>236</sup>

Perhaps a better way to frame the question is to ask, if melodrama is ultimately about rendering legible a “moral occult” in a moment when traditional patterns of moral order have been shaken, what is doing the shaking at the turn of the 19th century in Japan? We may find clues to the answer in the Kansei Reforms themselves, which were aimed at both fiscal and moral reform. The Reforms were in part a reaction to the fact that the increasing development of the commercial economy was altering the foundations of the social order. The various economic

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 5, 15.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 14. For a work that quite explicitly takes as its primary focus the question of the relationship between melodrama and modernity, see Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>236</sup> On my approach to the term “modernity” in this dissertation, see the last section of the dissertation introduction. Indeed, the elements I point to here at the close of the present chapter--the growth of a complex commercial economy and the rise of a marketplace for popular fiction (via the technology of print and the presence of a sizable urban readership)--are clear instances of *modernization*, and ones for which parallels can be found in many societies around the world at roughly the same time (with, as should be expected and embraced, many differences among them). Whether they are instances of “modernity” in any essential sense is not my concern here, and I suspect unanswerable.

and social crises that precipitated the Reforms marked a moment when the gap between the social ideology upon which the political order was based--one rooted in models of idealized, hierarchical human relationship--and the very different, and ultimately impersonal order embodied in the flow of capital, was becoming precariously apparent. A reassertion by the authorities of control over money--over the paths it was allowed to travel, over the places where it accumulated, and ultimately over the power and danger it presented to the social order, with its rich merchants and deeply indebted lords--was one of the primary aims of the Reforms. Money does not reward virtue. It does not abide by hierarchical human relationships, and it does not discern between good and evil. If an anxiety to discern a moral occult is one of the driving forces in the development of a melodramatic mode in *gesaku* fiction, might it not be connected to a growing consciousness that an increasingly powerful force in human society--money--does not behave according to moral rules? There are hints throughout these works of anxiety over the relationship between moral status and money: virtue's trajectory from obscurity to recognition in *gesaku* vendetta fiction is also often a trajectory from poverty to material comfort. In *The Double Vendetta of Osugi and Otama*, the impersonal quality of money proves the undoing of the sisters' virtuous father: the purely accidental plunge of a bag of gold coins into a river has drastic repercussions on his moral relationship both to his lord and to his daughters. Even in the shogunate's *Official Records of Filial Piety and Righteousness*, every account of virtuous behavior concludes with the monetary reward of the protagonist; it is as though the compilers were anxious to assert that the moral order and the monetary order do coincide--that money does indeed reward virtue.

There are other elements we can identify that could potentially mark the “modernity” of the moment of melodrama’s appearance within the world of Japanese literature--including, for example, the fact that it coincides precisely with the moment when the the authorities recognized popular literature itself as something potentially threatening to the hegemony of their moral ideology, and therefore a legitimate target for intervention. Nonetheless, the melodramatic mode’s rage for moral legibility seems an important clue to the nature of its appeal, at a moment when the increasingly powerful force of capital--a force that does not abide by any “traditional pattern” of moral order--was making its presence felt, exposing contradictions and paradoxes of the social order and its moral ideology in the process. That this mode, at this particular moment, found its primary means of expression through the topos of vendetta--a practice that symbolically affirms the relationships underlying the “traditional patterns” of moral order in the most extreme manner--should perhaps come as no surprise.



## Conclusion

### Vendetta Literature, Past, Present...and Future?

It is the near future, close enough to the present to look uncannily similar to the Japan of today. Certain things remain the same; others are undeniably different. The economy is depressed. Violent crime is on the rise. The country is embroiled in a vaguely specified state of war. Alarmist rhetoric and nationalist propaganda blare from loudspeakers at various times of day. And--a distinct divergence--under the Vendetta Law (*katakiuchi no hō*) passed two years previously, vendetta has been formally legalized. It takes a form vaguely resembling that of the Edo period--though now vengeance is carried out by the gun rather than the sword. Facilitated by a convoluted legal and bureaucratic apparatus, the practice is governed by a protocol of regulations and restrictions thick enough to fill a thick, standard-issue handbook. The surviving family members of murder victims have the right to seek lethal satisfaction from the killers, but given the danger of such an undertaking, it is also now legal to hire a proxy killer (*katakiuchi shikkō dairinin*), who will carry out the revenge on the family's behalf without putting any of its surviving members at risk--a point markedly different from early modern vendetta practice. Agencies exist to provide such proxy avengers. The targets of vendetta have official rights (*taishōsha no kenri*) as well. They are provided with formal, documentary notice that a vendetta has been instigated against them; they are granted a four-day grace period following the notification; they are issued a weapon for self defense; and they have the right to employ a bodyguard. (If they cannot afford a bodyguard, a government-appointed bodyguard will be made available to them.) Revenge is regulated by a legal apparatus involving the courts, but it is not a matter of legal punishment by the state; a murderer can serve a term in prison for having broken

the nations's law, and still be targeted by a vendetta. Revenge is not about law-breaking; it is about atonement. This atonement is owed to the deceased victim and surviving family members, not the authorities.

Such is the premise of Matsumoto Jirō's (b. 1970) *manga* series *Freesia* (*Furijia*, 2001-2009), a text that points to the fact that the imagination of formal revenge is still very much alive in Japanese popular literature, and still inflected with the idiosyncrasies of the practice's long history.<sup>237</sup> It is a text that also reminds us of the many ways in which revenge is something good to think with, a narrative frame that powerfully elicits various anxieties, moralities, and nuances of the contemporary moment of its representation. While *Freesia* clearly draws its central conceit from the early modern legacy of legally permitted, bureaucratically regulated revenge, it is striking to observe the differences in the meanings revenge in this text is made to point to.

Perhaps most immediately noticeable, after a thorough steeping in early modern vendetta fiction, is the complete absence of the moral underpinnings of vendetta. The sense of an underlying moral ideology that affirms, through revenge, the integrity of certain fundamental family relationships, is completely absent in this dystopian near-future. There is no discourse of filial piety, no hierarchical order within the family of who can avenge whom--and the existence of proxy killers undermines the sense of self-sacrifice that traditionally contributes to the construction of the avenger as a moving, exemplary figure. With the vanishing of moral exemplarity goes the celebratory sense of virtue triumphing over villainy; also gone is the humane restraint shown by the proper agent of vengeance. In this future world, the sole,

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<sup>237</sup> Matsumoto Jirō, *Furijia*, 12 vol. (Tokyo: Ikki Comix, 2001-2009). A live-action motion picture based on the series, directed by Kumakiri Kazuyoshi, was released in 2007.

underlying motivation to the practice is rancor, *urami*--and rancor indulged is a frightening thing. Family members leave threatening messages on the answering machines of their enemies, taunting them about their impending deaths; the permission to pursue revenge is depicted as unleashing a kind of primal, unsettling bloodlust, grotesquely illustrated in the manga through detailed scenes of horrific bloodletting. We are closer here to the medieval world of the early *Soga* story than to the Edo period--everyone seems to harbor a grudge against everyone else, everyone is eager to indulge their resentment.



Fig. 1. Vengeance unleashed in *Freesia*. (Vol. 1, p. 54.)

When the niceties and etiquette of polite human interaction do appear, they seem so out of place, so improperly juxtaposed with the broader context, that one experiences them as jarring and hollow. A representative of the proxy avenger agency arrives at the apartment of a future vendetta victim to provide formal notification that the courts have authorized a vendetta against him. The man cowers in a back room; his distraught mother answers the door and pleads for mercy with the bureaucratic agent of their future destruction. The agent, however, speaks in the impersonal voice of an officary at work: "Would you please sign or affix your seal to these documents," she says. "If anything in the paperwork is unclear, please call the Metropolitan Citizens' Lifestyle Consultation Hotline."<sup>238</sup> As she departs, she quaintly leaves them with a bag of oranges, the way a visiting neighbor might, as a token gesture of solicitude. The entire scene is wrenchingly cruel. The breezy impersonality and formal speech of an official in the face of real human anguish; the hollowness of the gift, proffered to a suffering family that craves the greater, and withheld, gift of mercy; the trivial assistance of a blandly anonymous helpline when life and death hang in the balance--revenge, in this iteration, becomes a vehicle to convey all that is *wrong* with human relationships in urban Japan at the turn of the 21st century.<sup>239</sup> The "vendetta effect" continues to do its work, constituting a lethal, morally charged framework that can elicit the contradictions and violence immanent in details of the everyday.

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid., vol. 1, 40-41.

<sup>239</sup> Edo period authors of revenge literature masked its critical valence by conventionally setting the narratives in the past; *Freesia* is set in the near-future, but its critiques, too, are clearly aimed at the contemporary moment. Such temporal framing has an effect: there is something both thrilling and chilling about seeing familiar aspects of one's moment rendered uncannily sinister, as through witnessing the violent potential inherent in even the smaller details of our way of life tugged nonchalantly into ruthless visibility.



Fig. 2 Officialdom and oranges in Freesia. (Vol. 1, p. 42).

In this dissertation I have argued that such critical potential runs throughout the history of the representation of vendetta in Japanese literature, though always expressed in the ever-changing idioms of different moments. Thus, if we begin moving back in time--and back through the chapters of the dissertation--we see that a sharp emphasis on the clear divisions between right and wrong, virtue and villainy, and an emphasis on the moral validity of vendetta, serve as vehicles to reveal the darker underside of the dominant moral ideology at the turn of the 19th century in the work of Santō Kyōden (Chapter Four). In the late 17th century, the moral status

and life-or-death stakes of vendetta are effectively integrated by Ihara Saikaku into complex narratives that problematize contemporary assumptions about the status of lower-class working women, and question the terms of exchange that inhere among monetary, moral, and emotional economies (Chapter Three). Throughout the Edo period, the conventions of vendetta fiction, particularly the temporary removal of the avenger from the social relationships that largely determine social identity in early modern Japan, constitute a powerful vehicle for the questioning, evaluation, and re-imagining of the relationship between those broader social communities and the individual (Chapter Two). Moving back still further in time, we discover that throughout the centuries preceding the Edo period, vendetta was always imagined as possessing a disruptive potential vis-a-vis established orders and figures of authority, and its agents depicted as having recourse to powers (moral, emotional, metaphysical) that enabled and legitimized their defiance of forces of superior strength or social stature.

This critical potential, which ultimately runs throughout the history of vendetta literature, serves as a potent reminder of the complex work literature--even seemingly ephemeral, popular literature--can be made to do in a community's attempts to make sense of its world. I have attempted to show the ways in which early modern vendetta fiction, even in its most formulaic and predictable incarnations, constitutes a richly generative site in which authors and readers could encounter, reflect upon, re-imagine, and challenge aspects of their contemporary world. Indeed, vendetta literature was involved in creating the imagination and understanding of that world, its narratives woven from sophisticated language and literary modes that could speak to the emotions and intellects of readers in ways unavailable beyond the realm of imaginative literature. Readers may have turned to it for entertainment; it may have been driven by the forces

of a fiction marketplace; its own authors (like Shikitei Sanba) may have discounted its value, but it, too, must be understood as an active agent in the constitution of early modern discourse, ideology, and culture. Above all, it participated in the active imagination of moral meaning in a society undergoing experiences of significant change, often speaking--through the unique topos of revenge--to broader sociocultural elements of life, thought, and experience far beyond the matter of revenge itself.

The body of vendetta literature, for all the numerous works that comprise it, ultimately constitutes only one small corner of the much vaster sea of early modern popular literature. The sheer volume of extant works that make up this larger ocean is astounding and overwhelming. To take the example of two major writers whose works I have touched upon in this dissertation, the *Teihon Saikaku zenshū*, which includes all of Saikaku's extant complete works, runs to 14 volumes, while the *Santō Kyōden zenshū* currently stands at 13 volumes, all of them running between nearly 500-700 pages--and five volumes have yet to be released. Those are simply two among hundreds of (often equally prolific) authors who produced works of popular fiction for the print marketplace of Edo period Japan. Beyond the works themselves, there is an equally vast sea of supporting written materials that can be drawn upon for their explication. With so much material to work with, it is perhaps not surprising that a considerable amount of the scholarship on early modern Japanese popular literature can tend towards an author-by-author approach, or towards the explication of highly specific details within the texts, from the identification of literary allusions to the discovery of historical inspirations for particular characters or scenarios. This tendency towards a microscopic approach to the popular literature of the early modern period appears to have intensified in the past two decades. Such work no doubt brings its

rewards. Yet I believe the example of vendetta literature points to the ways in which Edo period popular fiction must be understood as also speaking, eloquently and imaginatively, to larger sociocultural contexts and concerns, through its details, but also in larger patterns and modes that risk being overlooked if the microscopes are trained too closely. It is my hope that this dissertation makes some contribution to acknowledging the sophisticated ways early modern popular literature works to make sense of, and in the process helps create, the broader world beyond its pages.



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